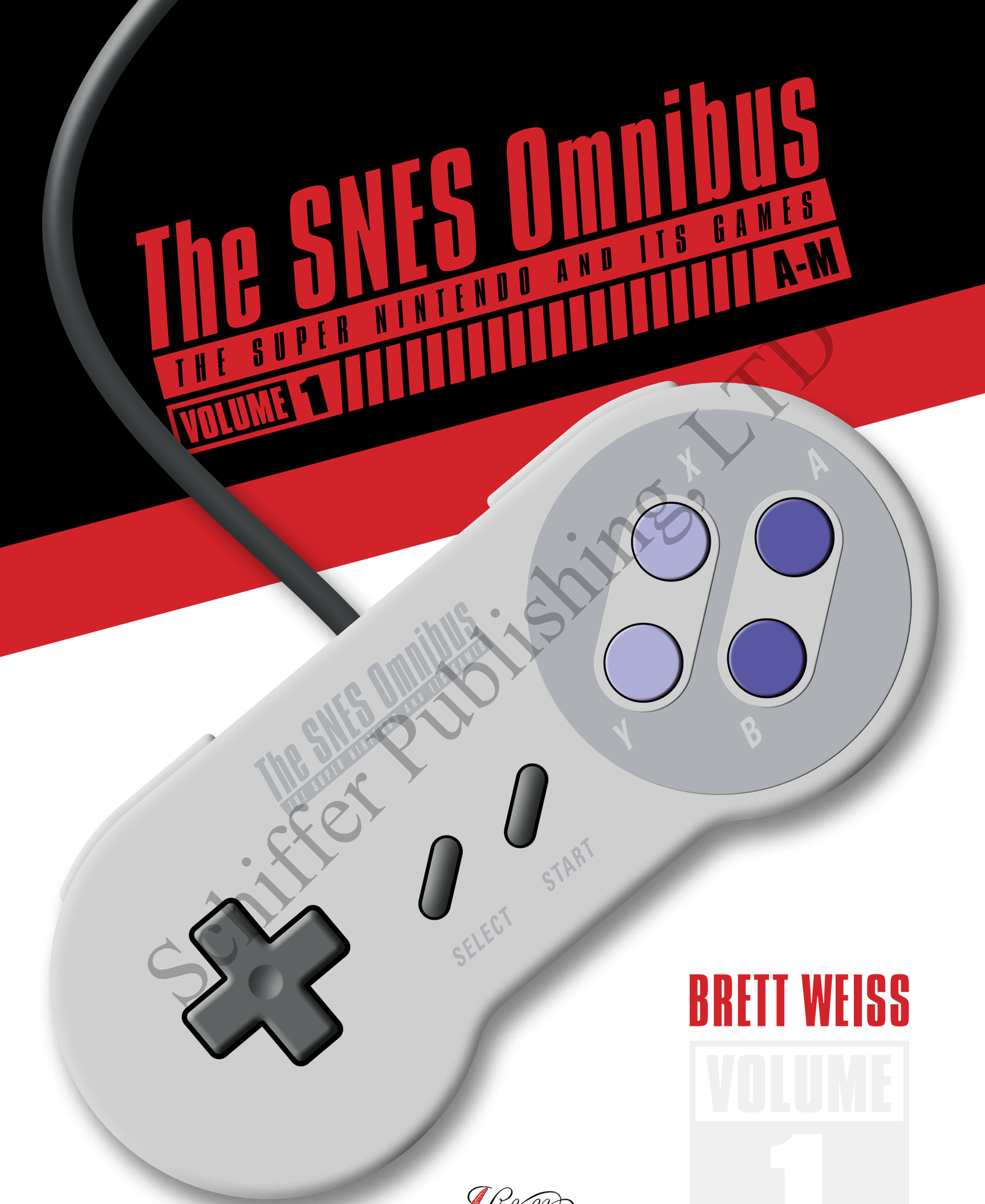
The SNES Omnibus

THE SUPER NINTENDO AND ITS GAMES

VOLUME 1 A-M



Schiffer Publishing, LTD
The SNES Omnibus
THE SUPER NINTENDO AND ITS GAMES

BRETT WEISS

VOLUME 1

Schiffer Publishing Ltd
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This book is dedicated to Charis, Ryan, and Katie, the greatest family a guy could ever have; to my mom, Joan, whose love and support are unequaled; and to my dad, Perry, whom we miss every day. This book is also dedicated to all you creative and passionate gamers out there who not only collect and play video games, but also create clever and amusing videos, host video game conventions, program homebrew titles for old systems, mod consoles to do more than their designers intended, and much more. When you do it right, you guys and gals help keep retro gaming going strong.

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FOREWORD

BY BILL LOGUIDICE

When reflecting on what is arguably Nintendo's greatest console in the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES), it's important to briefly consider how it all came about.

With the unprecedented success of the Family Computer (Famicom) and Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) through the end of the 1980s in key territories like Japan and North America respectively, Nintendo clearly had the luxury of time. Much to the frustration of a rabid fan base who could only dream about what heights Nintendo could achieve with their first next-generation system, there was simply no great need to release a successor console until the company was good and ready.

First released in Japan in 1983, the Famicom's architecture was nothing if not forward-thinking. While its core hardware was relatively modest, the Famicom's ability to use in-cartridge enhancer chips was its technological saving grace. This simple capability, combined with incredible software support, allowed the Famicom to stay relevant despite the release of increasingly sophisticated systems from a growing number of aggressive competitors.

No console, though, no matter how well-designed, can remain at the top of the market forever, and the Famicom was no exception. With the increasing popularity of next-generation systems like NEC's PC Engine (1987) in Japan, and Sega's Genesis in North America and Europe (where it was known by its Japanese name, Mega Drive, first released there in 1988), it was finally time for Nintendo to respond in kind. And, just a little more than a year and a half after the successful Japanese launch of their portable Game Boy, respond they did.

Released in 1990 in Japan, 1991 in North America, and 1992 in Europe, the Super Famicom, or Super Nintendo as it's known to Westerners, was perhaps Nintendo's most uncompromising console vision. Designed not merely to match the competition, but to dominate it, the total audio-visual capabilities of the SNES were unmatched at the time of its release.

The Super NES contained a 16-bit Rico 5A22 CPU running at 3.58 MHz and a Picture Processing Unit (PPU) that could output a common resolution of 256x224 pixels with up to 256 colors on-screen at one time from a palette of 32,768. The system's background layers were made up of 32x32 to 128x128 tiles on one of two foreground or background planes, with eight different color palettes. Each of these layers could be scrolled horizontally and vertically, allowing for some impressive effects.

The console featured eight such graphics modes, numbered 0–7, but the most famous was Mode 7. In this mode, one layer of 128x128 tiles from a set of 256 could be rotated and scaled using matrix transformations, with HDMA used to generate perspective effects. Put simply, background images could be rotated and scaled freely to simulate 3D environments without any performance hits to other processing activities.

While the Super NES's graphics capabilities deservedly received a lot of attention, the audio subsystem was arguably even more impressive sounding than the output of its colorful PPU looked. An 8-bit Sony SPC700 and a 16-bit DSP shared 64KB of SRAM and a clock speed of 24.576 MHz. In combination, these two processors generated a 16-bit waveform at 32 kHz by mixing input from eight independent voices and an 8-tap FIR filter. Each of the eight voices could play its sound sample at a variable rate, with Gaussian interpolation, stereo panning, and ADSR, linear, non-linear, or direct volume envelope adjustment. All of these features combined to create some of the cleanest and richest sound output of its era, which could be further augmented by passing stereo audio data from a cartridge, expansion port, or both, before sending the combined output to a television or audio receiver.

Nintendo also had the foresight to take the Famicom's enhancer chip concept to the next level, which meant that there was no real ceiling to what the new console could eventually do. Two of the most popular such cartridge add-ins were the DSP- and Super FX-series chips, though they certainly weren't the only ones. The DSP chips were a series of fixed-point digital signal processor chips that allowed for fast vector-based calculations, bitmap conversion, 2D and 3D coordinate transformation, and other enhancements. The Super FX chips were a series of RISC CPUs primarily used for creating the type of 3D game worlds consisting of the types of polygons, texture mapping, and light source shading that the SNES by itself could never hope to reproduce. In some cases, these chips could even enhance the elements of regular 2D games.

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Great power was also paired with great control. Included with each SNES console were two eight-button controllers, supporting six action buttons by default. This trumped the Famicom's and PC Engine's two action buttons, and the Genesis's three. Even with the latter two systems eventually getting six-button controllers of their own, the fact that developers couldn't count on players owning the updated designs meant that their control schemes, particularly in their early games, could be quite limited.

Of course, all the power and forward-thinking designs in the world mean nothing without the games. Fortunately, Nintendo carried over their previous 8-bit design mastery into 16-bits. Launching the Super Famicom in Japan with *Super Mario World* and *F-Zero*, Nintendo demonstrated an ability to further perfect what was already masterful with the former, and, with the latter, demonstrated how the increased power could enable new ways to play familiar game types through the use of little-before-seen special effects. The company followed with such iconic titles as *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, *Donkey Kong Country*, and *Super Metroid*, among others.

The SNES enjoyed robust third-party support as well, exemplified by such great games as *Chrono Trigger*, *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, *Super Castlevania IV*, *Street Fighter II: Turbo*, and the Super Star Wars trilogy, to name just a few.

Navigating a console platform this popular and as rich in games can obviously be a daunting task. Fortunately, we have someone like Brett Weiss, who is able to masterfully analyze the SNES library. As your personal tour guide for the best, and yes, sometimes worst, games a successful platform like this has to offer, Brett provides much-needed perspective to the usual game lists. And, as if implementing the print version of the enhancer chip concept, Brett also includes "notable quotables" and "insider insights" that help to further bring life to the SNES's extraordinary library.

My own appreciation and admiration for the SNES has only grown over the years. As we see an ever increasing number of modern games take their design cues from the classics, I feel that it's more important than ever to play them on the platform where they were first perfected. That's why I'm thankful that Brett was able to take on this massive project, providing the type of fun and entertaining resource this wildly influential platform deserves. Enjoy! –Bill Loguidice

Bill Loguidice is the author of eight technology books and was a writer and producer of Gameplay: The Story of the Videogame Revolution*, a feature film documentary on the history of video games. He runs the popular website Armchair Arcade and continues to write for a variety of major publications. Bill owns and maintains well over 500 different video game and computer systems from the 1970s to the present day, which helps inform his writing.*

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PREFACE

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the publishing industry, along with virtually every other industry in the U.S., took a hit. My job as a freelance writer and editor for the All Game Guide (formerly allgame.com), a massive database at the time, was reduced to almost nothing and then vanished entirely as the company hosting the site released its off-site writers. The publishing arm of the company also cancelled a planned series of books that were to describe and review every video game for every console and computer, including, of course, the Super Nintendo. I was devastated.

I loved that job. Not only did it let me work from home, where I also played the role of dad to two great kids, I was super excited about the prospective book series, which I was going to be a big part of. Now I was faced with searching for a new job that probably wouldn't be as rewarding, as fun, or as flexible. My wife, Charis (a high school teacher), and I didn't want to put our kids in daycare (not that there's anything wrong with that—it just wasn't for us), and I wasn't sure what type of job I could get that would let me stay home with the kids and make a decent income.

I mentioned my conundrum to a longtime friend, Johnnie Holloway, and he suggested I work for him, helping promote his garage door company, which he was just getting up and running. I wasn't sure what to make of this offer at first as I didn't know (or care) anything about garage doors, but it turned out to be the perfect part-time job as it let me work at home and afforded me plenty of time to write on a freelance basis, contributing to various newspapers, magazines, and websites.

Flash forward to 2006, when I attended my first San Diego Comic-Con. There I met an editor working at a publisher's booth, where I bought a book about the TV series *Night Gallery*. I had previously read several books published by that company (mostly about monster movies), and I knew they offered an eclectic assortment of quality non-fiction titles. I gave the editor my business card and told her to let me know if they ever needed a contributor for one of their reference books.

Three days after I got home from San Diego, the editor sent me an email, asking if I had any good book ideas, to which I quickly responded, "Yes!" What the heck else was I going to say?!

Thinking back on my All Game Guide days and their cancelled book series, I pitched a book like what Leonard Maltin might do, but for video games instead of movies—shades of what trailblazing video game historian Leonard Herman did years earlier for Atari's original programmable console with *ABC to the VCS: A Directory of Software for the Atari 2600*. But my vision was to cover more than just one system—I wanted to cover ALL the video games for ALL the classic consoles.

Thus was born my Classic Home Video Games series, the first installment of which came out in 2007. I'm proud to say that *Classic Home Video Games: 1972–1984* was the first book about video games ever published by that company, which now has an entire line devoted to the subject. A signpost of sorts for the retro gaming boom of the past decade, it was also the first book to feature comprehensive coverage for such consoles as the Atari 5200, ColecoVision, Intellivision, Odyssey2, and Vectrex. (Other retro gaming milestones around that time included the rise of such YouTube celebs as The Angry Video Game Nerd, the late-2006 debut of the Wii Shop Channel offering a modern way to play vintage games, and the 2007 release of the documentary *The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters*.)

The next book in the series covered the Atari 7800, Nintendo NES, and Sega Master System, while the latest featured write-ups for every game for the three consoles that came out in 1989: the Neo Geo, TurboGrafx-16, and, most significantly, the Sega Genesis, which has more than 700 titles in its library. The next book, had I written it, would have covered the Atari Jaguar, Philips CD-i, Panasonic 3DO, and, most notably, the Super Nintendo, which also has more than 700 games.

Which leads to the book you are holding in your hands.

I began work on the fourth volume in the Classic Home Video Games series years ago, but I decided to abort that mission (at least for now) and instead focus exclusively on the Super Nintendo, primarily so I could give the iconic system the coverage it deserves. Instead of simply doing a brief write-up for each U.S. release for the console similar to the CHVG books, I decided to take a major leap forward and include quotes from other sources, more detailed information, and anecdotes and memories about many of the games, along with far more photos (in full color).

My favorite addition is what I call "insider insights," which are nostalgic stories by programmers, reviewers, authors, YouTubers, and other prominent gamers about some of their favorite (and, in some cases, least favorite) Super Nintendo titles. These true-life tales reveal what it was like to be a gamer during the 1990s: browsing the aisles at Blockbuster, trying to decide what to rent based on the box art; snagging a ticket at Toys "R" Us and taking it to that wondrous booth at the front of the store that held a treasure trove of games; staying up late in front of the family television set, bonding over a two-player game with a friend or relative—that kind of thing. It was a distinct honor and a whole lot of fun to edit such a fine group of stories, and I'm deeply thankful to the contributors for taking the time to share their SNES anecdotes.

Regarding the format of this book, I wrote the description for each game, along with the "fun facts" and "memories" you'll find scattered throughout. For games I had ample experience with, I included critiques within the descriptions. I also read through thousands of SNES reviews, both online and in vintage video game magazines, to cull just the right assortment of quotes for the "notable quotables," which I believe were important to include for giving readers a good, well-rounded view of each game.

One reason for my wanting to write a larger, more lavishly illustrated book is that the video game book publishing industry has exploded in the 10+ years since the first volume in the Classic Home Video Games series was published. While books about video games pale in number next to music, TV, movies, and sports, there are far more books about retro gaming than ever before, meaning the competition has increased exponentially.

I took my Super Nintendo book idea to Schiffer, which I had gotten acquainted with years ago through Michael Shalhoub's excellent series of massive pinball tomes. Schiffer, the publisher of my *The 100 Greatest Console Video Games: 1977–1987* book, responded to my

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query quickly and in the affirmative. Not only has my *100 Greatest* book sold well for the company, Schiffer is fully aware that the market for all things retro gaming, especially a popular system like the Super Nintendo, shows few signs of slowing down, as evidenced by robust prices for vintage games, gaming conventions popping up all over the country, and the frenzy surrounding Nintendo's "Classic Edition" line of plug-and-play consoles, including one for the SNES.

I bought my original Super Nintendo sometime in 1992 or early 1993, the first time I saw a reduction in price for the console. I believe I paid $149, which was $50 less than the launch price. That's usually how I roll. With rare exceptions, I'm what they call a "late adopter"—someone who almost never buys a console right when it comes out. I typically wait for a sale or get one used. (One exception to this was the Nintendo Wii—I was bowled over by the motion controls of the system's bowling and tennis games and simply had to have one right away.)

At the time of my original SNES purchase, I already had an Atari 2600, Intellivision, Odyssey2, ColecoVision, NES, and Sega Genesis in my bedroom, where I played them on a 19-inch color television set I had bought at Video Land back in 1983 for around $250 (this was with my brother-in-law's employee discount), a sum that will get you a nice, widescreen, high-def TV today. Since I had plenty of games to keep me busy, I viewed the Super Nintendo as more of a luxury item than a necessity. Boy, was I wrong.

After finally picking up the system and checking out the wonders of the expansive, mind-altering *Super Mario World*, the best of the system's five launch titles (which also included *F-Zero*, *Gradius III*, *Pilotwings*, and *SimCity*), I realized that the SNES was indeed essential. Maybe not as important as food, clothing, and shelter, but certainly not far behind.

In addition to logging countless hours on *Super Mario World*, I absolutely fell in love with many of the heavy hitters on the SNES, including two of the greatest trilogies (video games or otherwise) of all time: *Donkey Kong Country*, *Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest*, and *Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble!*; and *Super Star Wars*, *Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Super Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*.

I'm also a huge fan of such iconic titles as *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, *Super Metroid*, *Super Castlevania IV*, and *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*. These were sequels to great games for the original NES, but the characters were bigger and more colorful, the worlds were grander and more expansive, and the music seemed orchestral in quality. In short, these are some of the greatest, most famous video games ever made, and they hold up remarkably well today.

I also enjoy many of the lesser appreciated games for the SNES, including some of the classic arcade ports and sequels, such as *Q*bert 3*, which offers various cube formations, and *Space Invaders*, which adds two-player split screen action. In fact, my favorite video game of all time is the SNES version of *Mr. Do!* Not only is it a stellar port of Universal's 1982 arcade game—a fun, cartoonish, *Dig Dug*-like maze title with strategies galore—it features a two-player Battle Mode for awesome head-to-head action.

I originally intended this book to be a single work covering every U.S. release for the SNES, but with so much content, my publisher suggested dividing it into two volumes. After weighing the positives and negatives, I heartily agreed. By releasing it as two books (*A–M* and *N-Z*), there's room for much better coverage of each game: more photos, more information, more quotes from other sources, and best of all, more insider insights. You'll have to buy both books to read about every SNES game (as of this writing, I'm hard at work on volume two), but I believe you'll find the extra expense to be worth it.

Writing this book, doing the research, and editing the contributor stories was a huge undertaking, but I had a blast every step of the way. Well, that's not entirely true. With the deadline looming large, I had computer problems that were stressing me out. Luckily, my friend Kevin Burnett, who I've known since junior high, made two house calls to fix the problem. Also, our upstairs air conditioner, where my office and game room are, was out for a few days with temperatures reaching almost one hundred outside. As such, I did sweat it out at times, both literally and figuratively.

If this is your first book written by yours truly, welcome aboard! If you've read any of my previous works, thank you so much for your support! Whether you read this titanic tome from cover to cover, flip through it randomly, or look up your favorite games first, I sincerely hope you enjoy it. I firmly believe you'll come away from the experience knowing far more than you did about the Super Nintendo game library, the 1990s, and the people who played the games.

–Brett Weiss

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No nonfiction book is truly the work of just one person, and that certainly applies to *The SNES Omnibus: The Super Nintendo and Its Games, Vol. 1 (A–M)*.

Special thanks to everyone who contributed "insider insights," which are reviews and personal stories in the book about the SNES and its library of games written by people in the know: Martin Alessi, Dain Anderson, Chris Baker, Jeff Belmonte, Houston Bogus III, Jerry Bonner, Brittney Brombacher, Adam Burkholder, Van Burnham, Chris Cavanaugh, Lumpz T. Clown, William Culver, Dean DeFalco, Nick DeMarco, Rusel DeMaria (who also wrote the "Console Wars" essay), Catherine DeSpira, Tyler Esposito, Rob Faraldi, Blair Farrell, Robert Ferguson, Raymond Fix, Anthony Frisina, Richard Grisham, Blake J. Harris, Jon D. Harrison, Keith Haus, Kieren Hawken, Erin Hawley, Jason Heine, Matt Henzel, Patrick Hickey Jr., Mike Hodson, Ken Horowitz, Zoe K. Howard, Darran Lee Jones, Steve Juon, Kurt Kalata, Sam Kennedy, Ethan King, Russ Kumro, Anthony J. La Gambina, Ben Lancaster, Tim Lapetino, Sulaiman Larokko, Jeff Lawhead, Shawn Long, Larry Luper Jr., Rob McCallum, Alex McCumbers (who also wrote the essay on emulation), Matt McMullen, Delf Meek, Kale Menges, Mike Mertes, Jason Micciche, Matt Miller, Arda Ocal, Joshua L. Olson, Jeremy Parish, Patrick Scott Patterson, Eric Perez, Christopher Pico, Matt Raithel, Kris Randazzo, Benjamin Reeves, John Riggs, Dan Ryan, Greg Sewart, Barry Shank, Adam Shub, Andy Slaven, Stephen Smith, Zack Smith, Shane Stein, Rob Strangman, Darren Sulfridge, John Szczepaniak, Sarah Szefer, Michael Thomasson, Alex Thompson, Thor Thorvaldson, Sean Tiedeman, Juan Vaca, David Warhol, Charis McCoy Weiss (my amazing wife), Ryan Weiss (my awesome son), Greg Wilcox, Krystle-Dawn M. Willing, Jeffrey Wittenhagen, Steve Woita, and Robert Workman. You can find their biographies at the back of the book.

Special thanks for various images in the book to Ed Meyer (who went way above and beyond), Leonard Herman, Matt Henzel (videogameobsession.com), Joe Santulli (digitpress.com), Dain Anderson (nintendoage.com), and www.MobyGames.com. Props also to Thor Thorvaldson, the talented artist responsible for the beautiful centerfold mashup of SNES characters, and to Charis Weiss, who took the author photo.

Special thanks to Bill Loguidice, who wrote the wonderful and ridiculously technical foreword, and to Kevin Burnett, who fixed my computer when my deadline to complete the manuscript was breathing down my neck.

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SUPER NINTENDO GAMES A–M

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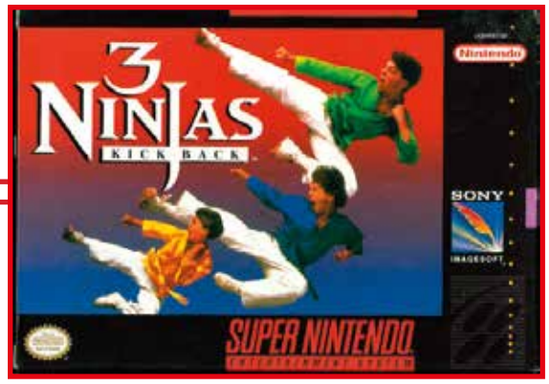
3 Ninjas Kick Back

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Malibu Interactive.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



Loosely based on the 1994 film of the same name, *3 Ninjas Kick Back* is a scrolling combat game supplemented with lots of platforming. There are three selectable characters, each of whom is outfitted with a different weapon. Rocky wields a bo staff, Colt brandishes a sword, and Tum-Tum fights with a pair of sai for battling ninjas, nurses, birds, sumo wrestlers, and other repetitious enemies. There are spikes and fire spouts to avoid, ledges to grab, stairs and ladders to climb, giant boulders to jump over, vines to swing on, moving platforms to ride, coins to collect for extra lives, small spaces to crawl through, secrets to discover, bombs to pick up and throw, bosses to battle, fire-breathing dragons to slay, and more.

Levels are timed, and it's sometimes necessary to collect or destroy certain items to complete an area. Environments include the woods, the hillside, a training ground, a cabin, a secret cave, a hospital, Japanese gardens, Castle Osaka, and a cave of gold. The storyline revolves around the search for a magical dagger. Also released for the Genesis. The Sega CD version is a double feature that also includes *Hook*.

Notable Quotable

"This sort of game is an insult to the intelligence of all thinking beings, but it must be reviewed. Does anybody actually care about a game adapted from a dismal movie like *3 Ninjas Kick Back*? Hopefully not . . . the game is your standard platform action with cutesy graphics that revolve around a trio of suburban ninja-kids who say witty things like, 'Let's kick butt!' Been there, done that. Ho-hum. So when is that Sony PlayStation coming out?" –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (March 1995)

Notable Quotable

"A game based off of a movie sequel that should have never been made for a franchise that should have never existed . . . While you can choose between any of the three ninjas, they all basically play the same, despite having different weapons . . . Your weapons are grossly underpowered, which will result in some cheap chips out of your life bar and add to the frustration factor quite a bit . . . The visuals are definitely the game's strong point. Though characters seem a little small, they're all nicely animated and cartoony in a good sort of way. Enemy variety is on the lean side, however. Environments also look nice and offer a lot of neat background art, though some levels, such as the cabin, pale in comparison to the others . . . Sound, to be blunt, is horrible . . . Difficulty, control, and sound quirks aside, when I came into this I was expecting pure, unadulterated crap, but what I got was something that I can only describe as unexpectedly acceptable. After reading comments on the movie, I can honestly say that this is one of those rare cases when the game is better than the movie, though not by much." –Brad Hicks (www.swankworld.com)

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The 7th Saga

PUBLISHER: Enix.
DEVELOPER: Produce.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

One of the more challenging (and at times frustrating) RPGs in terms of monster battles and level progression, *The 7th Saga* lets players select from seven different characters: an elf (Esuna, the only female), a dwarf, a monk-like wizard, a human fighter, an alien, a demon, and a giant robot. The objective is to collect seven lost mystical runes (in the fantasy land of Ticondera) that endow their possessor with special powers. During the quest, players encounter (and sometimes fight) the other six characters and can team up with one of them.

Battles are turn-based, and during your turn you can elect to attack, defend, cast a spell, use an item, or escape. Other activities include talking to non-player characters, entering buildings, buying and selling items, searching for hidden items, and resting at an inn. A radar-like crystal ball helps players track enemies, towns, dungeons, and runes. *The 7th Saga* has nice music and solid graphics, but the ending is disappointing. Fans of *Dragon Warrior* may enjoy it.

Notable Quotable

"Even on a system renowned for its expansive library of RPGs, successfully completing *The 7th Saga* is an unforgettable experience. Unfortunately, this is solely due to its patently unfair difficulty, because the generic dungeons, incomprehensible abbreviations, and skeletal excuse for a plot would likely put everyone to sleep if all the random encounters weren't straight out of their darkest nightmares." –Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable

"In the pantheon of classic RPGs, *The 7th Saga* stands out as one of the more memorable titles for the SNES. In 1993, it was one of the first RPGs to use Mode 7 graphics, as demonstrated with a revolving camera angle used in the middle of battle, where the camera would turn to face whatever enemy the main character was attacking as opposed to the more popular *Final Fantasy* model of having enemies on one side of the screen and the heroes on the other. It utilizes a unique random enemy encounter system where enemy positions would show up as moving dots on a mini-map. It has a myriad of unique and colorful enemies and took full advantage of the SNES's 256 colors in bringing them to life. Unlike [many] other RPG games for the SNES, the enemies in *The 7th Saga* aren't still-life drawings but actually animated creations in combat. These features make *The 7th Saga* distinguishable from some of its contemporaries." –My Gamer (www.mygamer.com)

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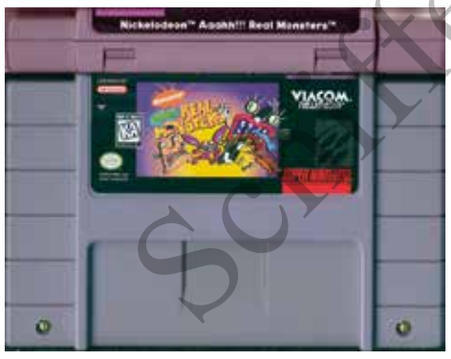
Aaahh!!! Real Monsters

PUBLISHER: Viacom New Media.
DEVELOPER: Realtime Associates.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

A nifty extension of the Nickelodeon cartoon series (1994–1997, four seasons), *Aaahh!!! Real Monsters* finds Ickis, Krumm, and Oblina working as a team, searching for items, and using scares and throwable trash to battle junkyard cats, kids with water balloons, postal workers, radio-controlled dune buggies, and other enemies. Each of the monsters is selectable at any time, with the other two tagging along (à la *The Lost Vikings*), and each has a special triple monster move for jumping farther (over chasms and the like), searching for hidden rooms, or climbing tall obstacles. Levels include City Dump, Human School, Post Office, Natural History Museum, The Mall, and Monster Hunter's House, each of which is filled with such obstacles as trash compactors, paper airplanes, heavy mailbags, or spiky skeletons. The levels also contain such useful constructs as springs, slides, levers (for opening doors), trampolines, conveyor belts, and toilets (for quick transportation). The Sega Genesis version of the game has more puzzles.



Notable Quotable

"Beginners will appreciate the game's simplicity and the easy-to-find hidden areas, but the stiff controls may frustrate some." –*GamePro* (February 1996)

Notable Quotable

"Both versions feature more or less the same gaming experience, but there are some differences in the levels. The Super Nintendo game, for example, has more varied bonus rounds, while the Genesis game overall offers a greater challenge." –Nintendo Player (www.nintendoplayer.com)

Notable Quotable

"*Aaahh!!! Real Monsters* focuses heavily on teamwork . . . I appreciate the idea that they have to work together to get through the game. However, I never once had to actually use Krumm's eye-tossing ability. There are a few nice bits of fan service. For instance, if you leave the gang idle for a bit, they'll do some familiar tricks from the show, which is funny and appreciated . . .half the levels take place in the junkyard . . . it gets very repetitive . . . While I love the three playable characters idea, it feels a bit cluttered at times, with all three running around in a clump . . . I basically used Ickis for the entire game because he's the smallest and fastest and best jumper." –Toon Gaming (YouTube)

Scarfer Publishing

ABC Monday Night Football

PUBLISHER: Data East.
DEVELOPER: Kuusou Kagaku.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

Play as one of twenty-eight fictional teams, such as the Buffalo Wings, Miami Sharks, or Dallas Dollars, in *ABC Monday Night Football*, which lacks NFL or NFLPA licensing (players and teams are relatively close approximations of their real-life counterparts), but does offer digitized announcer Frank Gifford: "Whoa, Nellie, touchdown!" You can rename teams and players and even create custom teams. The gridiron action is viewed from behind the quarterback, and there are three standard modes of play: Season, Exhibition, and Two Player.

You can select from ten plays in your playbook, and there's a Super Play mode that zooms in on the action. Runners can dive and do spin moves, and tapping a button makes them move faster. Defenders can leap in the air to intercept the ball and make tackles, and a button makes them move faster as well. The game also includes replays, savable player stats, booing and cheering fans, and Mode 7 rotation and scaling effects. A Gatorade sports drink logo is on the 50-yard line.

Memories:
When I was a kid growing up during the 1970s, my dad, my older brother, and I would watch *Monday Night Football* on television each week. The highlight (so to speak) was Howard Cosell's half-time highlights presentation, where, before the days of ESPN's *SportsCenter*, Cosell would replay key events from the previous NFL Sunday in decidedly dramatic fashion. The lowlight was my obnoxious brother making noise and flicking pieces of ice at me while we tried to watch the game—it was like Chinese water torture but colder. Despite its flaws, I would rather play *ABC Monday Night Football* than be pelted by ice flecks.

Notable Quotable

"Part of the enjoyment of football is the speed . . . a necessary component of the game that *ABC Monday Night Football* misses entirely. Though the intro, complete with always-classic theme music and clashing helmets, signifies something great, it's all a farce . . . The field can rotate and spin all it wants; it doesn't make a good game . . . The agonizing pace renders this impossible to play, and it's made harder due to incorrectly sized sprites. A player in the opposite end zone could be the same size as the running back closest to the screen. This jumpy animation makes it tough to figure out depth, and it's even harder to throw a pass when your receivers are dwarfed by a mountain of a defender . . . Nothing here feels like football, and even if the speed issue were fixed, we'd still be left with graphical issues, bad AI, and a failure to use the license on anything other than the menus." –Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

Insider Insight:
ABC Monday Night Football was not a great game. In fact, it was barely average. The CPU was a complete joke. As a twelve-year-old, I could shut out the CPU 63-0, play without punting, and sack the quarterback at will. Despite boasting NFL legend and *Monday Night Football* color commentator Frank Gifford's likeness, it was just a plain vanilla football game.

However, one thing made the game memorable: the ability to create an entire team from scratch. Playing the role of team owner, I'd enter my friends' names to correspond with the positions they played outside in real football. I would be the pass-catching fullback or tight end. The adults in my life would be the defensive and offensive tackles, since they were bigger than us prepubescent preteens. After about forty-five minutes of tirelessly making sure everything was right, I'd have an entire team ready to play a season.

A few days after going undefeated in the regular season and playoffs, I'd tell my friends how they did. Some would be mad, some would be happy, but none would understand how I'd have insane numbers like 2,000 yards receiving, 130 receptions, and thirty-seven touchdowns. Because of that, a barely passable NFL simulation that probably didn't deserve the Nintendo Seal of Quality ended up being one of my favorite football video games of all time. –Patrick Hickey Jr.

Schiffer Publishing LTD

ACME Animation Factory

PUBLISHER: SunSoft.
DEVELOPER: Probe Software.
GAME TYPE: Art, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Compatible with both the standard control pad and the Super NES Mouse, *ACME Animation Factory* is essentially a Looney Tunes take on *Mario Paint*, but not as good. In Drawing Board mode, Porky Pig plays host as you create your own backgrounds, characters, and messages. Animation Studio, presided over by Daffy Duck, lets you color and edit Looney Tunes characters as well as create and animate your own creatures. At the Music Hall, the Looney Tunes Band, with Bugs Bunny conducting, orchestrates your musical compositions. Marvin the Martian helps you save and load your creations (only one drawing and one animation can be saved at a time) while Speedy Gonzalez lets you set the controls.

The program includes a variety of art tools for drawing, erasing, making copies, rewinding, fast forwarding, selecting patterns, mixing colors, rubber stamping patterns and colors, speeding up the animation, framing and adding words to your drawings, and more. A special Game Arcade mode hosted by Wile E. Coyote lets you engage in a little Looney Tunes Mix 'N Match, which is based on the old matching game, Concentration. As with *Color a Dinosaur* for the NES and *Art Alive* for the Genesis, the manual recommends that users record their creations on video tape.

Notable Quotable:
"With the point-and-click icons, the easy controls let you do everything efficiently. This game might inspire a whole new generation of animators." –*GamePro* (January 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"With the success of *Mario Paint*, it wasn't at all surprising to see other games attempt to mimic its signature formula . . . the tools make it seem like a virtual coloring book, and my interest waned pretty fast. It just didn't have the original magic that *Mario Paint* had." –Thomas "Copernicus Nerdicus" Torre (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

Scarfer Publishing, LLC

ActRaiser

PUBLISHER: Enix.
DEVELOPER: Quintet.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/World-Building Simulator, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

A fine mix of side-scrolling action and world-building strategy, *ActRaiser* lets players control the god-like Master, who must protect six lands and direct the growth of those lands. The platforming action involves running, jumping, crouching, and using a sword and magic to battle such fantasy foes as centaurs, demons, dragons, and walking trees. During the *Populous*-like strategy portions, players must construct cities, send down miracles, clear out deserts and swamps, and, as the cherubic Angel, use bows and arrows to protect the population from monsters who burn fields, kidnap followers, and cause earthquakes. *ActRaiser* spawned an arcade game and an SNES sequel.

Notable Quotable

"*ActRaiser* was one of the first games to hit store shelves following the launch of the SNES in North America and also one of the first games to really show off what the system could do. The juxtaposition of side-scrolling action levels and top-down city-building portions was innovative at the time. The graphics demonstrated the system's ability to push rich 16-bit colors, multilayered backgrounds, and large bosses while Yuzo Koshiro's emotionally evocative musical score raised the standards of what people would later come to expect from video game soundtracks." –Frank Provo (www.gamespot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*ActRaiser* was a unique game for its time and remains so to this day. The game gets resounding props for successfully being two games at once, both an action-platformer and a city builder . . . The melding of the two styles was not what we would call smooth, though. The city building and platforming looked and played remarkably different, even if both contributed equally to the overall meta goals of the game. In a strange way, the jarring differences between the two styles added to the charm of the game. Moreover, both modes were well done, and the overall package was extremely fun to play." –Digital Trends (www.digitaltrends.com), which ranked *ActRaiser* the 18th best SNES game.

Insider Insight:
ActRaiser was my killer app for the Super Nintendo. I was so excited by what I was seeing in *Nintendo Power* during my junior year of high school that I got a job working at Kmart just to earn enough money to purchase the console so I could play the game. Did it live up to my self-imposed hype? You bet! Stunningly colorful graphics, tight control, beautifully composed music by the always-amazing Yuzo Koshiro, and some of the best boss battles on the SNES. But what really sets this game apart and keeps me coming back all these years later, are the two distinct gameplay styles—side-scrolling action/platformer and god simulator. Each is balanced to perfection, with one never outstaying its welcome over the other; both are ultra-fun to play. To this day, *ActRaiser* remains my favorite video game of all time. –Christopher Pico

Insider Insight:
I don't remember who actually wrote the words, but just before the release of the Super Nintendo, I remember reading impressions of *ActRaiser* that included the sentiment that it was like having a "symphony inside your SNES." Of course I had to check this out for myself. Sure enough, *ActRaiser*'s soundtrack was like nothing I'd ever hear before. This was before I'd experienced CD-ROM gaming, so hearing such rich sound during gameplay was completely new and exciting for me. It made the whole thing feel truly cinematic.

I fell in love with the game right away, even though it's not the most exciting thing ever. The village-building bits slow progress to a crawl, though I really liked the drama that would play out in each area. Plus I don't think I've ever played a game before or since where I controlled a naked cherub shooting monsters high above mud huts.

But I really enjoyed the side-scrolling bits. Again, the music had a whole lot to do with this, since the action isn't all that impressive. The bosses, however, are at least really impressive-looking. And I always loved how a statue of my bad-ass, evil-smiting deity would sit in each land for eternity, sword triumphantly raised to the sky. –Greg Sewart

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd

ActRaiser 2

PUBLISHER: Enix.
DEVELOPER: Quintet.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Powerful, fearsome demons have combined their might to raise Tanzra, the Lord of Evil. His hatred for you runs eternal, and, vowing revenge, he's sent his demons to attack your people and in general wreak havoc and destruction. You must put an end to this vile creature and his minions once and for all.

The sequel to *ActRaiser*, a favorite among many SNES devotees, *ActRaiser 2* drops the strategy/world-building god-game elements of the original in favor of all-out action. You, as a winged, musclebound warrior, must battle your way through seven detailed, beautifully illustrated levels (including a forest with rivers, dungeons, an ice-covered world, and an underwater city), hacking and slashing demons along the way. You can swing your sword and block with your shield in all directions, and you can glide, dive, and jump (on platforms and over obstacles).

You can also find items to recover your hit points and use seven types of magic: fire breath (use from a standing position only), spark element (use while jumping), raging bomb, earth force, thunder bolt (use in midair), aura shoot (use while gliding in midair), and phoenix (use when making a quick landing). Three difficulty levels are available: easy, medium, and hard.

Notable Quotable:

"While you will undoubtedly enjoy every minute of *ActRaiser 2*'s platforming action, it's hard to roll back half of the gameplay and still be satisfied . . . looks and sounds as fantastic as the original . . . sports some deliriously clever boss battles, such as a reaper on a cloud looking like something that just stepped out of a Bosch painting. And then there's the beast of a zillion eyes. Great stuff." –Levi Buchanan (www.ign.com)

Notable Quotable:

"This was one of my first—and most important—mistakes in my career. At the time, I was convinced that players wanted action. They wanted to be challenged and pushed to new levels. I pushed Enix away from retaining the sim part of *ActRaiser* and toward a more challenging action title . . . I removed the soul from *ActRaiser*, and that was a really tough lesson to learn, but it's one that has really helped me along the way." –Robert Jerauld, former producer at Enix, speaking to gaming.moe.

Super Publishing, LLC

The Addams Family

PUBLISHER: Ocean.
DEVELOPER: Ocean.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

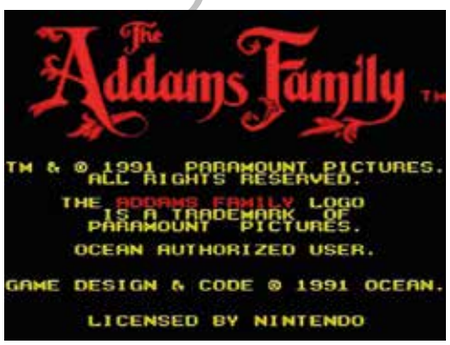
The Addams Family has players guiding the Addams patriarch, Gomez, as he runs, jumps, and explores the Addams mansion (including Pugsley's Den, the Sports Hall, The Hat Room, Under the Graveyard, The Library, The Old Tree, and more), searching for his family: Morticia, Pugsley, Wednesday, Granny, and Lurch. During the quest, Thing will provide hints, and Gomez will avoid traps, gather money, and jump on ghosts, skulls, mummies, jack-o-lanterns, and other enemies. In addition, Gomez will use such weapons as a sword and golf balls and such items as spring boards and a propeller.

The music is eerie but repetitious, and the graphics are cartoonishly mediocre. The platforming action is fairly enjoyable, and there are cool bosses and plenty of hidden areas, including places where Gomez can grab extra lives. The game is based on the 1991 feature film, which was based on the 1960s sitcom, which was based on Charles Addams' cartoon panels published in *The New Yorker* (from 1938–1988). The SNES cart plays a lot like the Genesis version but has better graphics and includes parallax scrolling.

Notable Quotable:

"By the time Ocean Software were developing *The Addams Family* as a single player platformer on the SNES in 1992, they were already a dab hand at delivering movie licenses as games. They were confident enough to not hang around for a cohesive story adaptation and instead invested time into creating grisly bosses and building a vast mansion with surrounding graveyard and gardens. The game tricks you with both its cute stumpy characters, jaunty tunes and the freedom to explore, but hits hard when fiendish enemies demolish your five lives and you become overwhelmed by the open-ended gameplay. It continues to frustrate unless you strategically focus on mastering specific level routes to discover power-up weapons, gather extra lives and earn energy hearts to extend your life bar. The depth of it only begins to reward the player when they unlock passwords to stagger their hunt for Gomez's family members. This game is built for explorers and not for people in a hurry, or impatient gamers, and overall makes for a good gaming experience." –Jamie O'Neill (www.nintendolife.com)

Insider Insight:
"They're creepy and they're kooky, mysterious and spooky, they're altogether ooky, The Addams Family." Just a mention of the name sparks a rendition of *The Addams Family* theme tune in my head, along with the appropriate finger snapping. This is partly thanks to the spooky sitcom family getting a film-based comeback in the early '90s starring the late Raúl Juliá as Gomez and Angelica Huston as Morticia. The huge success of the movie meant a sequel would follow as well as every kind of merchandise you can think of, including, of course, a video game. The UK-based software house Ocean did a sterling job of capturing the magic, even if it did lack originality. *The Addams Family* is basically a clone of Nintendo's *Super Mario World*. Usually I cannot stand these types of platformers—I find them frustrating, annoying, and boring in equal measure. But for some reason I just loved *The Addams Family*. I don't know if it was the subject matter, the authentic graphics and sound, or just that it was a truly great game. –Kieren Hawken



Schiffer Publishing LTD

The Addams Family:
Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt

PUBLISHER: Ocean of America.
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Based on *The Addams Family* cartoon that aired from 1992–1993, *Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt* has you, as the title character, on a mission to find six items that his demented sister, Wednesday, has hidden throughout the Addams Family Mansion. You'll run, jump (on enemies and over such hazards as spikes, spears, swinging maces, guillotine blades, and cannon balls), climb (on ropes and chains), crawl (through small gaps), and duck through the attic, basement, bathroom, laboratory, and freezer, and through the interior of a crystal ball.

Pugsley accesses each area through doorways in a hallway hub. At the end of each level, there's a boss, most memorably a washing machine that throws garments. Standard enemies include crabs, flying rubber duckies, mice, rolling eyeballs, knights, and more. Holding down the corresponding button makes Pugsley run faster and jump higher. To progress through certain puzzling areas, Pugsley must flip switches to make blocks appear and disappear. Some switches must be head-butted while others must be stood on or touched. Certain switches must be hit in the correct order, with sound prompts given as clues to solving the puzzle.

There are no continues in this challenging game, but you can collect hearts and money to replenish lost health and add extra lives. Pugsley skids when he stops, which can be annoying, but the game has gorgeous graphics, such as very nicely drawn test tubes and other equipment in the laboratory. Much different than the NES version, which is basically the original *The Addams Family* with Pugsley as the playable character instead of Gomez. The Game Boy version is similar to the NES game.

Notable Quotable:

"The first game [*The Addams Family*] was a bit too easy—it was tricky to start with but wasn't a real challenge . . . we've ended up with a tougher game in the new *Addams*—it's not so open-ended so you have to complete some sections before you can go on to others . . . the controls are quite different—it's faster, a bit more arcade-like. It's got some great graphics, too . . . Things like the crystal ball effect you couldn't do on any other machine, or the color layering effect on the bubbles in the bathroom." –James Higgins (*Super Play* #2, December 1992), programmer of *The Addams Family: Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt*.

Insider Insight:
Back when I was a kid in 1993, I rented *Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt*, and it just about did me in. I understand that many video games were made to be hard, but *Fester's Quest* and *The Addams Family* movie tie-ins were at least fun. *Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt*, on the other hand, was so difficult you could "affectionately" call it the *Milon's Secret Castle* of the SNES. As with that beguiling NES cartridge, this one lives up to its name in that you have to search for virtually everything, including the levels. While I don't mind picking what level I start with, I at least hope the game will show me where they are. Most *Addams Family* games have nice graphics and music, and *Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt* is no exception, but the gameplay leaves a lot to be desired.

After playing the game to the point of frustration, I turned it off and left it on the floor until it had to be returned, counting the days till the following weekend when I could rent something else. While I was never able to get anywhere beyond the first level during my teens, my return to the game for this write-up didn't fare any better. Finding myself constantly stuck and unsure of where to go got old nearly twenty-five years ago, and it gets old now. My teenage self didn't have the patience for this one and, sadly, neither do I in my thirties. If there is a true black sheep in the *Addams Family* game library, *Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt* is it. –Zoe K. Howard

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Addams Family Values

PUBLISHER: Ocean of America.
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

Baby Pubert, the most recent addition to the Addams Family, has been abducted by Debbie Jellinski, his former nanny. As Uncle Fester, it is your job to rescue little Pubert by searching the nicely rendered surrounding areas of the Addams mansion—forests, graveyards, swamps, gardens, and the like—while avoiding traps, solving puzzles, and killing monsters, including vultures, gargoyles, bats, ghosts, and ghouls (some of which will hide and surprise you). During your mission, which is backed by a suitably atmospheric soundtrack, you'll run into Gomez, Morticia, Lurch, and other members of the Addams Family, who lend advice and provide items, such as a box of seeds for producing enemy-attacking mini bushes, black beetle cookies that give Fester a dose of ill-health (a good thing in this case), stone marbles for turning attackers into rock, a bowling ball for hitting enemies and breaking through walls, and a battery that powers up Fester's standard Zzap attack. When Fester takes damage, his attack range decreases.

Within the seven top-down levels of play, there are tons of creatures to zap and items to find, making for a steep challenge. The game is better than *Fester's Quest* for the NES, but never comes close to reaching the heights of *The Legend of Zelda*, which it obviously borrows from. Loosely based on the 1993 feature film of the same name, *Addams Family Values* was also released for the Mega Drive, but not the Genesis.

Memories:
I enjoyed both *Addams Family* films, particularly Christina Ricci's deadpan, stone-faced portrayal of Wednesday Addams. Ricci, whose first movie was *Mermaids* (1990), went on to star in such quality films as *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), *Prozac Nation* (2001), and *Monster* (2003).

Insider Insight:
The Addams Family is one of those shows that has been around my entire life. *Fester's Quest* for the NES was my first video game in the franchise and, even though it ticked me off, I loved every minute of it. The game, based on the first movie, was just as aggravating as it was fun. Unfortunately, *Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt* for the SNES did a pretty good job of discouraging me from playing any more *Addams Family* games.

But then came the feature film *Addams Family Values*, a name that is synonymous with the phrase "what happened?" Many critics, including myself, felt as though the movie took the magic out of *The Addams Family* and turned it into clichéd, middle-of-the-road garbage. When I came across the SNES game a few years ago, I recognized the cover art instantly from the movie. I had avoided it for years, thinking it was going to be just as bad as the film. Could something good actually come from a movie that was so uninteresting? My curiosity got the best of me, and I had to try it.

Upon plugging in the cartridge, I immediately regretted the idea of playing it. I thought to myself, "A quest to find baby Pubert can't be that interesting." Then I started playing the game and discovered that it took the style of *Fester's Quest* and expanded upon it with greater detail. The further I got in the game, the more I loved it! Even if the writing wasn't quite up to *Addams Family* standards, it was a far better experience than the movie. I've always said I love being proven wrong, and while it took twenty years, this was one of those experiences that showed why. –Zoe K. Howard

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Advanced Dungeons & Dragons:
Eye of the Beholder

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: First-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Based on the 2nd Edition rules of the popular role-playing game, *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons: Eye of the Beholder* is a first-person, 3D adventure with an original story created specifically for the game. An evil entity known only as Xanathar has permeated the ancient City of Waterdeep. As Paladinson you must brave the underground dungeons, sewers, and catacombs of that city, hunting down this villainous presence. To be successful in the game, you will need to build a diverse party of four characters to join you in your quest. There are six species to choose from: humans, elves, half-elves, gnomes, dwarves, and halflings, each comprised of members of various classes, including fighters, paladins, clerics, rangers, magi, and thieves.

Each race, class, and species has unique abilities and strengths. For example, clerics have excellent healing and protective skills, rangers are good warriors, and gnomes are partially immune to the effects of magic. Along with your party of four, one or two more characters may join in if you choose to accept them. These characters are not under your control, but they do follow along, offering advice and information. The action in *Eye of the Beholder* consists primarily of casting spells and exploring the various dungeons. Armed with swords, bows, darts, and other weapons, you will also be called on to battle giant spiders, giant leeches, golems, skeletons, and other monsters. The Sega CD version of the game features a spoken intro, superior music, and digitized sound effects.

Memories:
As nerdy as I can be, and despite the fact that I used to co-own two comic book shops (Fantastic Comics & Cards in Fort Worth and North Richland Hills, Texas), I never got into *Dungeons & Dragons* or any other pen-and-paper or tabletop role-playing game. I did sit in on a few *D&D* sessions with my buddies who worked with me at Lone Star Comics in Arlington, but the games never really went anywhere—we mostly just sat around talking and drinking. I do remember naming one of my characters after Julius "Dr. J" Erving, my favorite basketball player of all time.

Notable Quotable:
"For *Dungeons & Dragons* fans, this game will likely be a dream come true. A highlight of this one is 3D graphics, as are the variety of characters. However, if you aren't an RPG fan, it's doubtful you'll be hooked." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"*Eye of the Beholder* lacks a sense of purpose. You spend much of the game wandering around a giant dungeon maze killing enemies and picking up stuff. That's for computer nerds, not SNES role-players! An auto-map feature would have made life easier, too, and allowing only one saved game is really inexcusable. RPG fans wait much too long between games, but this one—while not bad—may not be enough to satisfy the adventuring spirit of hungry gamers." –*Game Players* (August 1994)

Insider Insight:
I was introduced to *Dungeons & Dragons* as an impressionable twelve-year-old, and I quickly fell in love with its flexibility and the sheer amount of freedom that it offered. I would eagerly buy any video games based on *D&D*, but I was always left disappointed with the final result. That all changed, though, when I saw screenshots of *Eye of the Beholder* in an *Amiga* magazine. It looked absolutely incredible and, best of all, was set in one of my favorite universes, The Forgotten Realms. I had an SNES, though, and the SNES didn't tend to do these sorts of games.

Imagine my surprise then when three years later I was browsing the shelves of my local import video game emporium and saw a brand spanking new U.S. copy of that "mythical" game on the shelves. I hastily snapped it up, took the £60 hit on my wallet, and rushed home. Then I rushed back to the shop so that I could buy an SNES Mouse in order to retain the authentic experience. My god, it was glorious. Sneaking under the tunnels of Waterdeep, finding secret areas, and battling some of my favorite monsters felt like a dream come true, and I wasted an entire weekend in those dark and dingy tunnels, mapping each area out on graph paper.

Many later *D&D* games massively improved on the formula, including *Eye of the Beholder*'s very own sequel, but I'll never forget those original moments, gripping my mouse with tense excitement whenever I descended down to a new, unknown level. –Darran Lee Jones

Schiffer Publishing LTD

The Adventures of Batman & Robin

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Equipped with smoke bombs, Batarangs, x-ray goggles, throwing stars, plastic explosives, punches, kicks, throws, and other moves and weapons (there's an inventory screen with items and weapons to select from), you, as Batman, must work your way through eight themed stages, battling a bevy of bad guys, including supervillain bosses Joker, Two-Face, Catwoman, Riddler, Clayface, Poison Ivy, Penguin, Man-Bat, and Scarecrow. Stages include: Amused to Death (defuse bombs set by the Joker), No Green Peace (fight through a forest), Fowl Play (Penguin breaks into a museum), Tale of the Cat (chase Catwoman through alleys and over rooftops), Trouble in Transit (top-down Batmobile racing action), Perchance to Dream (Scarecrow plans to spread fear in Gotham), Riddle Me This (rescue Commissioner Gordon and his daughter Barbara in a virtual reality maze), and The Gauntlet (all the criminals conspire to defeat Batman).

Story segments with text play out between each level, the graphics evoke the classic cartoon, and the action is a lot of fun. Much different than the Genesis cartridge of the same name, which is a difficult, *Contra*-style, run-and-gun game with longer levels and a two-player simultaneous mode. The Sega CD game is different as well.

Memories:
Batman: The Animated Series (1992–1995), a.k.a. *The Adventures of Batman & Robin*, is one of the greatest cartoons of all time. Developed by producers Bruce Timm and Eric Radomski, the show has stylish visuals, mood-enhancing music (theme by Danny Elfman), and excellent voice acting (including Kevin Conroy as Batman and Mark Hamill as the Joker). The stories were first-rate as well, though I did get tired of seeing Batman get captured again and again without the villain taking off his mask—this element hewed too closely to the campy (if fondly remembered) TV show of the 1960s. During the early '90s, before I got married, my roommate and I—both of us huge comic book fans—would watch the show on TV every afternoon; it was a great way to unwind after work.

Insider Insight:
I knew I'd like *The Adventures of Batman & Robin* when I rented it one summer afternoon in 1995, but I wasn't expecting the best superhero game I had ever played up until that point. At a time when it seemed that superheroes only belonged in side-scrolling beat-'em-ups (*Batman Returns*, *Maximum Carnage*, *The Death and Return of Superman*, etc.), Konami dialed things back to a more traditional platforming approach in *Adventures*, all while dialing up the respect for the Dark Knight and his universe.

As much as I loved Sunsoft's two NES Batman titles, they felt more like "good action games that happened to star Batman" than they did actual BATMAN games—other than the Joker, the Caped Crusader was fighting unrecognizable enemies and relying on "toys" he doesn't actually use. Here, we have Batman going toe-to-toe with the roughest of his rogues gallery, throwing Batarangs to disarm thugs (such a cool mechanic!), all surrounded by an aesthetic ripped straight from the greatest animated series of all time. There is absolutely no doubt you're looking at a game based on the show that shares its name, and all of its fans should love that each level takes noticeable cues from some of the best episodes. Not until Neversoft's *Spider-Man* (PlayStation, 2000) would we see a superhero console game that respected its character as much as it valued stellar gameplay. –Chris Baker

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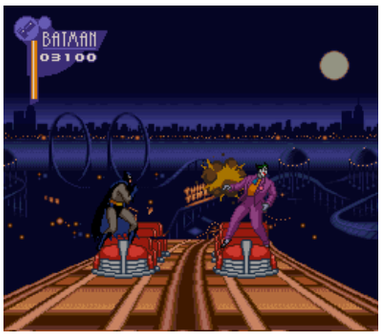


The Adventures of Dr. Franken

PUBLISHER: DTMC.
DEVELOPER: MovieTime.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

You control a cartoonish Frankenstein's monster named Franky, a diminutive, big-headed, undead dude wearing sandals, shades, purple shorts, and an orange T-shirt. In each of the game's twenty timed levels (castles, dungeons, forests, caves, and the like), you must search for four of your girlfriend's body parts that got lost in the mail. As with many platformers, the protagonist can run, jump, climb, and ride elevators, and he can punch and kick (including overhead kicks in this case). However, kicking right and left are mapped to separate buttons, an unnecessary and cumbersome "feature." Franky can also use smart bombs and throw fireballs at the enemies, which include kids on pogo sticks, disembodied heads, undead chefs, grim reapers, ghosts, giant fire-breathing frogs, and other freaks of nature. You must find the exit in each level, and there are puzzle and level design elements where you'll perform such actions as control a crane, maneuver platforms, ride a raft, and jump on a springboard, the last of which lets you reach otherwise inaccessible items.

This is a nice-looking game with a cool musical score and quirky enemies, but the control scheme does take some getting used to. Also, it could use boss battles to break up the repetition, and passwords for saving progress. Franky's health meter is short, but at least you can pick up extra energy and bonus lives throughout the game. The Game Boy version, called *Dr. Franken*, has passwords. NES and Game Gear versions were in development, but were never officially released. Known as *Dr. Franken* in other markets. Followed by *Dr. Franken II* (1997, Game Boy).

Memories:
During the 1930s, Universal's stable of classic creatures, such as Dracula and the Frankenstein monster, were deadly serious, starring in a series of dramatic, big-budget films. In the mid-to-late 1940s, budgets were cut, and the monsters began being played for laughs, starring alongside the legendary comedy team in such movies as *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* and *Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy*. This led to decades of parodies, pastiches, and pun-filled appearances by the monsters, including Forrest J Ackerman's cheeky wordplay in *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine. *The Adventures of Dr. Franken* continued that tradition, but the title doesn't really make much sense seeing as how you control the monster, not his maker.

Notable Quotable:
"Collecting bits of Bitsy becomes incredibly repetitive after several levels, despite some attempts to inject variety into the proceedings (the New York docklands level requires you to operate a crane to retrieve your paramour's parts). At no time does it ever rise above the level of spotting a switch and throwing it to see what it does. The kicks and punches are sluggish to operate if you're moving fast, so the sensible player takes everything at a Zimmer-frame pace. Sometimes it's a little unfair in this respect, and will have you cursing in disbelief as you're killed by a space-hopper that you chose to attack (although the lack of continues prevents you, unfortunately, from finishing the entire game in a weekend). *Dr Franken* really isn't very engaging, and the imbecilic expression on the monster's face when he dies doesn't exactly leave me clamoring for more." –*Super Play* (January 1994)

Schiffer Publishing LTD

The Adventures of Kid Kleets

PUBLISHER: Ocean of America.
DEVELOPER: Krisalis Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Known as *Soccer Kid* in Japan and Europe, *The Adventures of Kid Kleets* has you, as a young soccer fan, traveling to England, Italy, Russia, Japan, and the United States, trying to recover pieces of the stolen World Soccer Cup. Each country has three levels and a boss at the end. In each level, you must search for soccer cards. As you run and jump (on platforms, over spikes, etc.) through the various areas, you'll be dribbling a soccer ball with your feet, and you can kick it at the various enemies, including dogs, birds, flying fish, ninjas, punks, gymnasts, rugby players, robots, skateboarders, and sumo wrestlers. While this is a platformer and not a sports title, you can also do such moves as headers, overhead kicks, and bicycle kicks to advance past obstacles, collect items, and battle enemies. Adapted from *Soccer Kid* (1993) for the Commodore Amiga. Released for the 3DO, Game Boy Advance, and Jaguar as *Soccer Kid*. Similar in concept and execution to *Marko* for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"The sound is fitting and enjoyable, although unremarkable . . . the controls are innovative, but tricky to master, and the level design is quite varied . . . The game isn't too difficult but can be quite tricky if you plan on getting all the trophy fragments and the good ending." –GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)

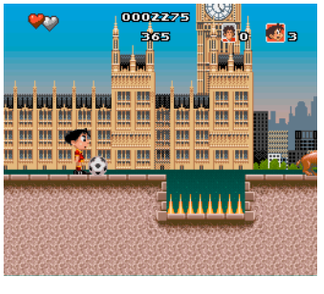
Notable Quotable:

"You know what's missing from today's video game lineup? More games involving a sadistic-looking child who moves faster than a hamster on PCP and defeats his enemies by kicking soccer balls at them. So you can imagine my utter joy when I discovered that the SNES has a title just like this, dubbed *The Adventures of Kid Kleets*/*Soccer Kid*. You can also imagine the sheer hate and vitriol that spewed forth after about five minutes of trying to play it . . . You can kick a soccer ball at some random nonsensical bad guys (including an old man on a motorbike and a mechanic who launches wrenches at your face like Patches O'Houlihan), but doing so makes the game incredibly difficult. I found a better method, however, which is to ignore the entire mechanics of the game and just run to the end of each level . . . when the very mechanic that the game is built around makes the game stupidly difficult and is totally pointless, you have to question the mentality of the developers." –Alan Teader (www.sticktwiddlers.com)

Insider Insight:

I was never much into traditional sports, but I had been playing soccer since it was first formally introduced in the state of Kentucky within an organized league. I played all through grade school and even at Purdue University. I rarely played sports video games, but *The Adventures of Kid Kleets* was the exception. Of course, this game was more of a platformer than a soccer simulator. That was made immediately apparent by the opening scene depicting a fiendish alien that steals the World Cup trophy and proceeds to smash it into pieces, scattering it to the far corners of the earth!

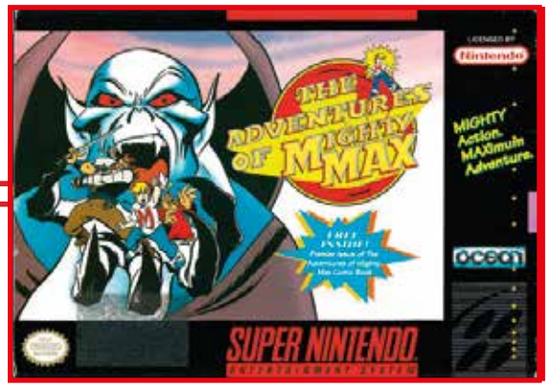
I just recently stopped playing real soccer after almost four decades, but only because I was tired of being on crutches as an old man. Thank goodness I can still play *The Adventures of Kid Kleets* in my retirement. The game is the closest I ever got to The World Cup trophy, but I adored the game so much that I helped publish the spiritual successor called *Marko's Magic Football* (*Marko* in the U.S.) years later. –Michael Thomasson



Schiffer Publishing LTD

The Adventures of Mighty Max

PUBLISHER: Ocean Software.
DEVELOPER: WJS Design.
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle/ Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994

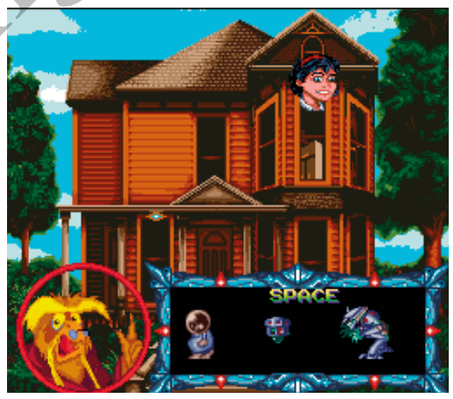


Based on the *Mighty Max* cartoon series (1993–1994), *The Adventures of Mighty Max* puts players in the title role of a blond boy wearing a red cap, blue jeans, and a white T-shirt. The time-traveling hero must traverse five timed, generically designed areas (Volcano, Space Station, Inca Ruins, Water, and Jungle), searching for hidden objects and transporting them to portals. Unfortunately, this is a difficult and tedious task.

Armed with a tennis ball cannon for warding off the various bats, mummies, sharks, Rock Monsters, and other minions of Skullmaster that populate the levels, Max can jump very high, and he can use such items as balloons, rafts, seesaws, and magnets to help him transport the objects to the portals. Max can also call on Norman (a Viking) and Virgil (an owl) for help. Gamers can opt to play as Felix or Bea, but gameplay remains essentially the same. A two-player split-screen mode lets gamers race to complete the objectives. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"I bought this game for my boyfriend since he loves the *Mighty Max* TV show and has an appreciation for SNES nostalgia. We both were super excited to play it, especially since it's a two-player game, but once we started we were quick to turn it off. My GOSH, it is TERRIBLE! There's no story and NO POINT. The whole game is you trying to pick up what looks like car parts and throw them into the portals. You don't know WHY you are doing this . . . you're lucky to complete a level (it's INCREDIBLY DIFFICULT since you have limited functionality with your controller) . . . Gameplay is very frustrating because you can't jump while carrying a 'car part,' you can only grab it and throw it. When you do jump it's like fifty-feet in the air—no joke! Oh, and you have to be careful about how high you jump because apparently you can hit your character's head on the sky and make him fall down! Yeah, totally bizarre and doesn't make any sense at all . . . but you are so lost from the get-go that it's pretty humorous. Eventually you move on to different worlds . . . which is probably the only remotely 'cool' thing about the game . . . Don't buy it unless you want it to taint your image of *Mighty Max*." – Miss Monet (amazon.com)



Surfer Publishing LTD

The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends

PUBLISHER: THQ Software.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering Inc.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

In this cartoon-inspired platformer, Boris Badenov and Natasha Fatale have stolen valuable items from the Rocky and Bullwinkle Museum, and it is up to Rocket "Rocky" J. Squirrel and his best friend, Bullwinkle J. Moose, to get them back. Rocky tosses nuts and spins his tail to battle enemies while Bullwinkle throws moose berries and bashes baddies (and rocks and other obstacles) with his head. Players guide both characters (one at a time), but Bullwinkle gets the majority of screen time. In addition to running, jumping, and confronting enemies (including ghosts, bats, rats, and a pirate boss), players climb a mountain, duck under birds, maneuver over a breaking bridge, explore a cave, negotiate moving platforms, ride in a boat and a mine cart, dodge spikes and electric chairs, and much more. Areas to explore include such locations as Grimalaya Mountains/Whynchutaka Peak, Caverns of Upsidasium, Upsidasium Mine, Sunken Ghost Pirate Ship of Captain Horatio Hornawoggle, Downtown Pottsylvania, and Skull Castle.

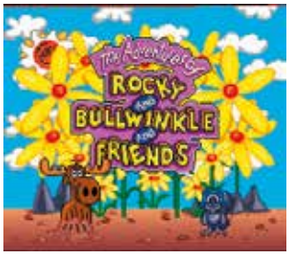
In addition, there are two minigames: Sherman must battle Mr. Peabody and a fire-breathing dragon, and Dudley Do-Right must ride a horse and rescue Nell Fenwick from getting run over by a train. The characters, evoking their witty TV counterparts, break through the fourth wall by saying such meta things (via text) as "the Game Boy version is much different." Indeed, the Game Boy version is much different, as is the NES rendition. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:
"Wretched marketing attempt of a game. Hard to say which is worse, this one or the NES version." –*Digital Press Collectors Guide: Advance Edition* (2004)

Fun Fact:
Rocky and Bullwinkle, which was known as *Rocky and His Friends* during the first two seasons and as *The Bullwinkle Show* for the final three seasons, debuted in 1959, on ABC. It was created by animation legend Jay Ward, with help from Alex Anderson and Bill Scott. The series of shorts was known for its bad puns mixed with sophisticated satire, making it fun for adults as well as kids.

Insider Insight:
The intrepid moose and squirrel were a big part of my childhood—I've wanted to live in Frostbite Falls for as long as I can remember. Jay Ward was a master storyteller, and the voices of June Foray were almost as familiar as my own mother's to me. I had high hopes for the game, until I learned that Toy Headquarters was involved. THQ became quite a good game publisher years later, but their early licensed efforts were mediocre at best. They had botched the handling of *Home Alone*, *James Bond Jr.*, and *Swamp Thing*, so my confidence level was not very high.

Upon first popping *The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends* into my Super Nintendo, I was delighted to discover that the game's writers had kept the witty dialogue in the tradition of the show and were weaving quite the fractured fairy tale! On the other hand, it seemed to me that this *Rocky and Bullwinkle* game had been programmed by the two no-goodniks, Boris Badenov and Natasha Fatale, instead. Quite villainous! –Michael Thomasson



Schiffer Publishing LTD

Adventures of Yogi Bear

PUBLISHER: Cybersoft/Empire Software.
DEVELOPER: Blue Turtle.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Hanna-Barbera's lovable Yogi Bear, known for claiming he's "smarter than the average bear," comes to the Super NES. The iconic character gathers "pic-i-nic" baskets and clocks, hops over and dodges skunks, snowmen, miners, rabbits, weasels, and other enemies, and reunites with Ranger Smith and Boo Boo. In certain areas he will ride a mine cart, swim, and go "beaver surfing." Oftentimes Yogi will jump on progressively higher baskets (which collects said baskets), catapulting him up into the air. Areas of Jellystone Park for Yogi to travel through include Snow Business, Cave Capers, Dream Time, Redwood Rendezvous, Water Palaver, and Construction Site Shenanigans. The objective is to save Jellystone from industrial developers.

The game's cute, cartoonish graphics (including parallax scrolling), smooth gameplay, orchestral music, and low difficulty will delight youngsters, but a distinct lack of options, weapons, power-ups, and challenges will alienate and eventually bore video veterans as monotony sets in. Known as *Yogi Bear* in Japan and *Yogi Bear's Cartoon Capers* in Europe.

Notable Quotable:
"Cartoon marketing 1, Gamers O. If this game wasn't somewhat rare, I'd say burn it." –*Digital Press Collectors Guide: Advance Edition* (2004)

Notable Quotable:
"I really wanted to like *Yogi Bear*, with the smooth, colorful graphics and sharp-looking Yogi. But it just wasn't enough to make up for the repetitive, unoriginal gameplay that makes Yogi a well-done copycat, nothing more." –*Game Players* (January 1995)

Fun Fact:
Yogi Bear debuted in 1958, as a supporting character in *The Huckleberry Hound Show*. He proved to be so popular that in 1961, he was given his own cartoon, *The Yogi Bear Show*. He was patterned after Art Carney's Ed Norton character on *The Honeymooners*, and, though Hanna-Barbera denied it, his name was probably inspired by New York Yankees star catcher Yogi Berra, who sued Hanna-Barbera Productions for defamation of character and then withdrew the lawsuit.

Insider Insight:
I was late to the party! In fact, I was exactly twenty years tardy since I didn't acquire a copy of *Adventures of Yogi Bear* and slide it into my SNES until 2014. My daughter, Lil' Anna Banana as we call her, was a big fan of Yogi and Boo-Boo. After watching the film *Yogi Bear* (2010), which featured the voice of Dan Aykroyd, she only had one thing on her mind—nabbing picnic baskets! Being smarter than the average bear, we decided that mimicking Yogi digitally would be a better alternative than entering Jellystone Park and starting a life of crime.

The game is good, lighthearted fun and everything that a five-year-old girl would want. *Adventures of Yogi Bear* is a perfect example of how a good game is timeless and how a new generation can appreciate entertainment created decades before its time. It is quite a beautiful thing to share a lifelong hobby and passion with the ones for whom you care the most. Besides, how can any game chock-full of pink fluffy bunnies that lets you ride a beaver like a surfboard be bad? –Michael Thomasson

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Aero Fighters

PUBLISHER: McO'River.
DEVELOPER: Video System.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

This top-down game is hard to find, and it's the very definition of a bullet-hell shooter, so it's got quite the reputation among retro gamers. There are eight playable characters, each of whom pilots a different plane with a different special weapon and artillery type: USA features Blaster Keaton (F-18, F.A.E, snake napalm) and Keith Bishop (F-14, tomahawk, phoenix missile); Japan has Hi-En (FSX, ninja beam, ninja missile) and Mao-Mao (F-15, E-wave, gull-laser); Sweden features Kohful the Viking (AJ-37, Thor hammer, metal storm) and Tee-Bee-10 (JAS-39, grand napalm, float mine); and the UK has William Sid Pride (AV-8, supporting bomber, cross missile) and River N. White (IDS, ring bomb, napalm dispenser). In two-player mode, both players must fight for the same country.

You fly through the not-so-friendly skies in seven stages (USA, Japan, Sweden, UK, Middle East, Mediterranean, Russia, and Space), shooting tons of planes, helicopters, and bombers while avoiding their firepower. There are also land enemies like bases, tanks, and gun emplacements and such sea enemies as battleships and submarines. End-of-stage bosses, such as a giant tank, a giant bomber, and an alien Death Skull, are present as well. To help your cause, you can grab weapon power-ups, special weapons, 1-ups, and currency, the last of which gives you points—200,000 points grants an extra life. Based on Tecmo's 1992 arcade game. Known as *Sonic Wings* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"While the series doesn't get a sense of humor just yet, it does have some pretty cool stuff, like the Kremlin in Russia being a secret missile silo guarded by flying hover pods. It still does little to stand out from other shooters out at the time, and could easily be mistaken for other games . . . The Super Nintendo port . . . is actually surprisingly accurate to the original game. The screen space is a little shorter than the arcade version, and some of the bomb attacks seem a little chunkier, but the port is pretty solid. It comes with a couple of special features that are not in any other versions of the game, such as Rabio and Lepus as playable characters and a hidden boss mode where you only fight bosses. Both of these features are unlocked through codes." –Nick Zverloff and Weasel (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Insider Insight:

Aero Fighters is one of those SNES shmups that should have been played by more people but wasn't, due to low distribution by publisher McO'River. I remember renting this game from a local video store, bringing it home for the weekend, and almost immediately asking to go back to the store to get something else because it was so damned hard. Fortunately, my parents did not acquiesce to my demands.

This game, this beautifully challenging game, takes time. As I sat in my room that weekend, dying over and over again, something started to click. The game began to reveal itself to me, one "game over" at a time. And once I did get the hang of it, what a game I had! *Aero Fighters* let me pick from four different characters, each with unique weapons and mass attacks, and added in verticality to the levels. In certain areas, buildings were tall enough that I needed to blow them up first to attack the enemy planes. I was always impressed when a game did something new or different, and this one certainly did.

I rented the game over and over, eventually getting good enough to finish it a few times. While not my favorite shooter of all time, *Aero Fighters* is certainly near the top. I've never gone from hatred to love so quickly with a game, and I doubt I ever will again. –Dan Ryan

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Aero the Acro-Bat

PUBLISHER: SunSoft.
DEVELOPER: Iguana Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

The release of *Sonic the Hedgehog* (Genesis) spawned a plethora of imitators, including the frustratingly difficult *Aero the Acro-Bat*, which stars a vampire bat as the game's mascot/protagonist. Aero runs and jumps through four multi-stage worlds, including a circus, an amusement park, the woods, and a museum. To battle the clowns, jesters, twirling elephants, trapeze artists, and other enemies, some of which unleash cheap hits, Aero executes a diagonal spin-jump attack, but iffy controls make this a less-than-reliable maneuver. Aero can throw stars at baddies, but these are limited. Aero will also climb and slide down ladders, bounce on trampolines, dodge deadly spikes, swim, blast out of a cannon, fly over obstacles, bungee-jump, ride conveyor belts, walk across tightropes, glide through flaming hoops, ride roller coasters and log flumes, jump over chasms and on moving platforms, and skydive toward danger below (via Mode 7 bonus rounds that the Genesis version lacks).

The game moves at a rapid clip, levels have timed missions (such as Find 7 Star Platforms and Turn on All the Lights), and there is no save feature. The game has nice animation and colorful visuals, but it can be a confidence killer. Also released for the Game Boy Advance. Known in Japan as *Acrobat Kid*.

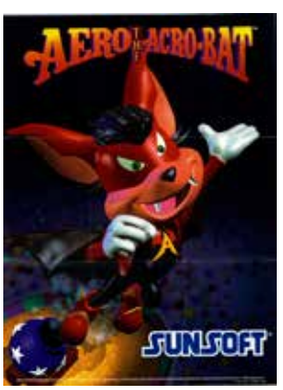
Notable Quotable:
"Our hero often feels slippery and imprecise to control, which causes problems in some of the game's more demanding platforming sequences—like when you have to navigate across giant fields of instant-kill spikes by landing on small balloons. Jumping feels floaty by default . . . The game compensates for those moments of frustration by being pretty liberal with its allocation of extra lives and frequent respawning checkpoints . . . Aero's a good investment. His origins aren't entirely original, and he can be a bit hard to handle here in his debut game, but the great variety of level design, different goals in each stage, and silly circus scenery make this a VC download that's worth 800 of your Wii Points to experience." –IGN's Lucas M. Thomas, reviewing the SNES game via the Virtual Console on the Nintendo Wii.

Insider Insight:
One of the best things about looking across vast libraries of classic games for something you missed is discovering treasures like *Aero the Acro-Bat*. I don't remember seeing this game in any of the old gaming magazines of my youth, but when I spotted it recently at a retro gaming store, the label caught my eye—it was clearly one of the old mascot games, the type that were so popular during the 16-bit era.

The moment I started playing it, I found a brightly colored world with a circus soundtrack that felt like it could have been written by Danny Elfman. The characters—with their attitudes and stereotypical 16-bit platformer design—transported me back in time to games like *Sonic the Hedgehog*.

My copy of *Aero the Acro-Bat* didn't come with the instruction manual, so it took me a while to figure out not only the controls, but the point of the levels as well. When I enter a level in a video game and realize it isn't an A-to-B experience, it really makes me smile, which is exactly what this game did. I stumbled across how to beat the levels by trial and error. This was how I used to have to do it during the '90s as well—very rarely did a rental game come with instructions.

Learning how *Aero the Acro-Bat* was structured and played only furthered my love for the idea of retro games and why I collect them. While it was but one game amongst dozens of copycats in its prime, *Aero the Acro-Bat*'s quality and playability stand the test of time. –Zoe K. Howard



Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Aero the Acro-Bat 2

PUBLISHER: SunSoft.
DEVELOPER: Iguana Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Aerialist Aero the Acro-Bat returns to battle his arch-enemy, wicked industrialist Edgar Ektor. The platforming action is similar to the first game, but there are some welcome improvements, including better controls and graphics, new friends and enemies, the ability to aim your drill straight down (so Aero can attack enemies directly below), the ability to slide under low pathways, story cutscenes between each world, and passwords for saving progress. In addition, there's a snowboarding stage, in which you ride your board from left to right collecting items, going up and down hills, and jumping ramps, and a locomotive stage, which is a standard-style platforming area that takes place on top of a moving train.

Some gamers will miss the circus atmosphere, objective-based action, and higher difficulty level of the original. In addition, the timer has been removed. One new feature is "Play Ektor." Hidden in each level are letters spelling out AERO. If you find all four letters, Ektor challenges you to a shell game in which you must guess which cup contains the golden Aero statue. The game has forty-five levels in all, taking you through such areas as Disco Fever, Bell Castle, Fort Redstar (an icy world), and Performer's Dungeon. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"Graphically, *Aero the Acro-Bat 2* is a slick-looking game. It features amazing detail in all of the levels, and even the multi-layered backdrops offer up some impressive visual eye candy from time to time, especially when you reach the psychedelic motion of the Disco Inferno level . . . [Aero has] a few frames of added animation, not to mention quite a bit more detail in his outfit . . . the developers took a bit more time with the soundtrack for this sequel and it really adds a whole new level of polish with so many varied types of musical tracks to enjoy . . . does everything a good sequel should. It takes the best ideas from the first game, fixes many of the flaws, and adds in just enough new material to set it apart from the original." –Corbie Dillard (www.nintendolife.com)

Schiffer Publishing

Aerobiz

PUBLISHER: Koei.
DEVELOPER: Koei.
GAME TYPE: Business Simulation, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

This unusual game puts you in the role of CEO of your own airline, negotiating for holding slots, ordering airplanes, opening air routes, setting a budget (for repairs, advertising, and service departments), saving capital, setting up branch offices, connecting twenty-two world cities (which can be affected by war, political uprisings, bad weather, tourist booms, and more), buying and selling aircraft, creating hubs, managing emergencies, monitoring data, and transporting a target number of passengers. A staff of business advisors, airplane attendants, negotiators, and others will help you achieve your goals. Real-life airline companies in the game include Boeing, Globus, McDonnell Douglas Corp., Airbus, and Markov. There are two scenarios from which to choose: 1963–1995 and 1983–2015. *Aerobiz* isn't much to look at (mainly data, an overhead map, and stills of buildings and airplanes), and the redundant music gets old in a hurry. However, the complex gameplay will appeal to simulation fans. Known as *Air Management: Ōzora ni Kakeru* in Japan. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"*Aerobiz* looks good, with little pictures appearing when something happens—a little plane takes off and lands in Mode 7 every time you open a new route, that sort of thing . . . But there is a problem: there just isn't enough to do. The trouble I had was that I spent my first few goes opening as many routes as possible As a result I took more money and more passengers than my competitors, and yet I made considerably less profit. It transpires that it's better to limit your routes—concentrate on flights in and out of just one country . . . So if you play the game properly, you'll spend most of your time nurturing your existing routes rather than making any major changes to your enterprise. Sure, this is how real businesses are run, but it's all a bit boring, isn't it?" – *Super Play* (May 1993)

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Aerobiz Supersonic

PUBLISHER: Koei.
DEVELOPER: Koei.
GAME TYPE: Business Simulation, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

The sequel to *Aerobiz*, *Aerobiz Supersonic* is a resource management game in which you play the CEO of a newly formed airline. The objective is to survive, thrive, and ultimately make your company the foremost in its field. This involves: organizing routes to eighty-nine international cities; maintaining your planes; establishing hub offices; advertising your services; tracking quarterly and annual sales reports; winning passengers away from competitors; dealing with such emergences as war, natural disasters, plane crashes, and employee strikes; investing in such business ventures as hotels, branch offices, amusement parks, concert halls, ski resorts, and golf courses; and much more.

To form your fleet, you can select from more than fifty airplanes, including a Boeing 747, a DC-10, and even some fictional aircraft. There are four eras of aviation history from which to choose, two of which are futuristic. Gameplay is suitably complex, but the graphics are merely average, depicting buildings, a world map, lots of text, little windows displaying world landmarks, a rotating globe, and a view from the pilot's seat. Known as *Air Management II: Kōkū Ō wo Mezase* in Japan. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"Exciting, challenging, and ultimately mystifying . . . Have you played this game? I'm out $65 that says you haven't. At first I was apprehensive to drop that kind of scratch dough on a game I'd never tried. The lack of nostalgic value severely limits the appeal of certain games [but] *Aerobiz Supersonic* stands up. It's one of the best games I've played for the SNES, and is absolutely worth a high price, even with fuel surcharges." –Ben Gelinas (edmontonjournal.com)

Publisher Proof

Air Cavalry

PUBLISHER: Cybersoft.
DEVELOPER: Synergistic Software.
GAME TYPE: Flight Combat Simulator, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Viewed from behind your helicopter gunship, *Air Cavalry* has you flying over deserts, oceans, and jungles, shooting missiles and rockets at stationary trucks and tanks, which are deadly accurate in firing back at you. There are three theaters of operations—Middle East, Indonesia, and Central America (each with six to eight missions)—and four choppers to pilot. Recon missions use the OH-6 Defender while transport and rescue missions require the UH-60 Blackhawk. Attack missions employ the AH-64H Apache or the futuristic AH-94.

The top half of the screen shows gameplay while the lower half displays the gauges and various readouts. In two-player simultaneous mode (versus, which is the most enjoyable way to play the game, or cooperative), the action is split-screen. A green gun sight helps you aim your fire, but ammunition is limited, making for a tough challenge. Mode 7 rotation effects as you steer freely throughout the missions give the game some visual panache.

Notable Quotable:

"*Air Cavalry* is for those who want a simulation game but don't have the patience. You won't have much patience left anyway after playing this one a few times. It's just way too easy to get shot. Not having chaff or radar jammers to ward off enemy attacks just makes it that much harder. Also, you can pretty much just fly around and lock on to every vehicle and fire the missiles and gun, but again, you get blasted too much. The only saving grace is a nifty two-player game." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1995)

Schiffer Publishing

Al Unser Jr.'s Road to the Top

PUBLISHER: Mindscape.
DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Go-Kart Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Judging from the title, you might assume *Al Unser Jr.'s Road to the Top* is a typical Formula-1 Indy racer similar to *Nigel Mansell's World Championship Racing* or *Michael Andretti's Indy Car Challenge*. It's not. Rather, it's a basic (playing and looking) *Super Mario Kart*-style go-kart game with four different types of racing events: Go-Karts, Snowmobiles (featuring jumps), Irocs, and Indy Cars. Within each event, there are three different races and three different vehicles from which to choose, each varying according to acceleration, braking, handling, and top speed. If you can manage to make it far enough into the game, you'll take on racing legend Al Unser Jr. himself in a final showdown in Vancouver. You can practice each of the other races, but not this last course.

With its simple controls and non-threatening gameplay, this is a good cart for beginners. You'll want to turn down the sound and crank up some tunes on your stereo or iPod, though, because the whine and revving of the engines can be grating. For a more traditional F-1 Indy racer featuring the same celebrity driver, try *Al Unser Jr.'s Turbo Racing* for the NES.

Fun Fact:
Al Unser Jr. is the son of racing legend Al Unser and the nephew of Bobby Unser. Al Jr. has won the Indianapolis 500 twice.

Notable Quotable:
"*Road to the Top* is a mediocre racing game. The most interesting thing is the snowmobile racing—you can get airborne by hitting icy bumps. Simplistic controls, limited options: Little Al's game is best for youngsters only." –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (October 1994)

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Aladdin, Disney's

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Based on Disney's popular animated film from 1992, *Aladdin* puts you in the role of the title character as he journeys through six cartoonlike levels of play: The Market Place, The Cave of Wonders, Escape from the Cave of Wonders, Inside the Genie's Lamp, The Pyramid, and Jafar's Palace. Like any good street urchin with a heart of gold, you are agile and can run, duck, jump (on moving platformers, over lava, spikes, rolling boulders, etc.), swing (from stalactites and on chains), do somersaults, bounce, zip-line, climb, and pull yourself up onto platforms. To stun the archers, knife-throwers, snake charmers, dueling guards, animated skeletons, and other enemies populating the levels, you can throw apples at and jump on them. You can also use a rug to glide through the air, and in some areas you can ride a magic carpet.

To help you survive the journey, you can collect bread and roasted chicken to refill your health meter, find hearts to add an extra heart to your health meter, and collect magic lamps for extra continues (one hundred emeralds grants an extra continue as well). Abu follows you but doesn't really do anything. The final battle is against Jafar, who turns into a cobra after you defeat his human form. Fans of the film will recognize instrumental versions of "One Jump Ahead," "Friend Like Me," and "A Whole New World." Also released for the Game Boy Advance. Much different than the Genesis version, which equips Abu with a scimitar.

Notable Quotable:

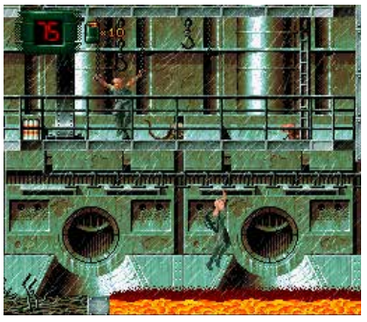
"The between-level presentation isn't a nice as it might have been, with the story unfolding in a rather dull, leaden way, but the levels themselves are simply fabulous. Aladdin himself is just as dexterous as he was in the film, and perfectly controllable. The graphics are excellent—both the backgrounds and the sprites, which are animated to Disney levels of perfection . . . Great to look at, very involving, and jam-packed with laughs. But in no time at all it's all over." – *Super Play* (January 1994)

Insider Insight:
When I first got this game, I had previously been unaware that Capcom had done an SNES version of *Aladdin*. I was only aware of the Sega Genesis version released by Virgin Games. I was a bit hesitant when first playing, because the gameplay was drastically different. But quickly my worries were met with some of the best gameplay I had ever experienced on the SNES. Capcom hit the nail on the head with *Aladdin*. Some of my favorite memories of playing the game were Inside the Genie's Lamp, Escape from the Cave of Wonders (on the magic carpet), and of course playing through the "A Whole New World" stage—yes, I'm a hopeless romantic and a big ole softy whenever I hear that song. –Eric Perez

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Alien 3

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Probe Software.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

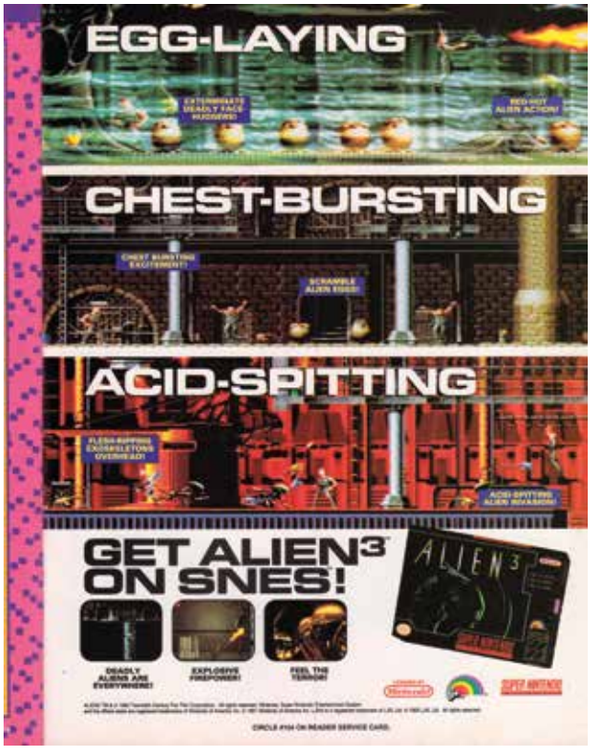


Like its otherwise much different Genesis counterpart, *Alien 3* for the SNES has players, as Ripley, exploring maze-like airshafts and dreary cell blocks, rescuing prisoners, and using a gun, a flamethrower, and grenades to destroy the title creatures, including facehuggers, young dog-like Aliens, and the Queen, who resides deep within the prison. Ripley, stranded on maximum security prison planet Florina "Fury" 161, walks, jumps, climbs up and down ladders, and uses a motion tracker to search for the monstrous enemies.

Unlike the more arcade-like Genesis version, the SNES game includes a variety of sub-missions, such as welding doors shut, destroying eggs, welding damaged pipes, repairing computers, and picking up power packs from one room and taking them to a generator in another. There are six levels in all, each with a variety of tasks. To restock your ammo and health kits, you can visit armory and medical rooms within the levels. The SNES rendition has darker, less cartoonish graphics than the Genesis game. The Game Gear version is similar to the Genesis release. Based on David Fincher's dreadful 1992 film.

Memories:
When I was in sixth grade in 1979, some of my lucky friends got to go see the original *Alien* film at the theater, and it was the talk of the playground and lunchroom for weeks. Kids spoke in gleeful detail about the chest-bursting scene, the creepy humanoid robot, and the scary, acid-dripping creatures. I didn't get to see the film until a couple of years later, when we got cable television and I rigged the box so we got all the premium movie channels, including HBO. I absolutely loved the movie and its first sequel, *Aliens* (1986), which added a dash of humor to the sci-fi scares. However, *Alien 3* (1992) left me cold after a promising first twenty minutes or so. The orange tinting, the guy who keeps yelling, and the rock music video-like direction of the creatures in action all amounted to a huge disappointment. Regarding the *Alien 3* video game, I spent most of my time with the Game Gear cartridge, which I would break out on road trips to Tyler, Texas, where my wife's mom lived.

Insider Insight:
In terms of licensed movie adaptations, no video game is going to be one-hundred-percent accurate. That said, *Alien 3* is my pick for one of the more unusual film-to-game translations for 8- and 16-bit systems. Of the Sega (Genesis, Master System, Game Gear) and Nintendo (NES, SNES, Game Boy) versions, only the SNES got the actual downbeat ending from the film and in fact is the most polished in terms of visuals, sound, and gameplay. While the other home console and the Game Gear versions are simpler timed run 'n' gun affairs (the GB one is a top-down adventure/shooter hybrid), the SNES gets a mission-based structure, connected maps to traverse, and a more tension-packed tone. All versions have weapons, a motion tracker, and multiple Aliens to contend with, making the games play more like the film audiences wanted to see over what ended up in theaters. –Greg Wilcox



Sniper Publishing LTD

Alien vs Predator

PUBLISHER: Activision.
DEVELOPER: Jorudan.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Inspired by the 1991 Dark Horse comic book series, which crossed two major movie properties, *Alien vs Predator* is a playable beat-'em-up, but is limited in terms of action (which is repetitious) and fun factor. In the twenty-fifth century, you control a Predator warrior in New Shanghai on the planet Vega. You're there to hunt humans, but instead you must battle Aliens (including drones, warriors, chest-bursters, and face-huggers), who appear onscreen no more than three at a time. You can punch the menacing creatures, but using the shoulder buttons for slide kicks is much more effective, almost to the point of feeling like a cheat. You can also jump-kick.

Downed enemies leave weapons, such as blade discs and javelin spears that you can throw several times before your supply is depleted. Environments include planetary surfaces, sewers, cliffs, waterfall basins, a spaceport elevator, and a starship. The final battle pits you against the Alien Queen. The characters are nicely detailed (despite subpar animation), but the music has a generic sound.

The Japanese version, with the slight name difference of *Aliens vs. Predator*, adds a one-on-one fighting mode. The SNES version of *Alien vs Predator* should not be confused with Capcom's superior arcade brawler (1994), the first-person shooter for the Atari Jaguar (1994), or the first-person shooter for the PC (1999).

Notable Quotable:

"*Final Fight* with aliens. Sounds like a great concept, shame about the execution . . . Graphics-wise, *AvP* has me extremely confused. On the one hand we have the shocking intro sequence and cutscenes, and on the other hand we have some of the biggest, baddest sprites you'll see on the 16-bit. Even the Predator in his weird bronze/blue getup looks the business. Shame everything moves like a *Benny Hill* episode . . . It's been a long time since I've heard music this bad on a SNES game . . . Boss fights are hilarious. They take up half the screen with our little Predator not far behind, which equals a lot of button mashing and no room to maneuver." –Arcade Attack (www.arcadeattack.co.uk)

Insider Insight:

In the pantheon of sci-fi movie monsters, the Xenomorphs from *Alien* have always been my personal favorite. Second to them are the Predators. So when I saw that there was an *Alien vs Predator* game, my hype was off the charts. It shouldn't have been, but I was a kid—what did I know? This game should have been an amazing experience. Beat-'em-ups didn't seem to be that hard to do, and some of my very favorite titles for the SNES were from that genre.

I remember being blown away at how good the graphics were (they aren't), how cool the story was (it isn't), and how awesome it was to be a Predator hunting down Aliens (it wasn't). You see, back before I had disposable income, new games were few and far between. Every purchase had to have value. So with *Alien vs Predator*, I played it a lot, searching for that value, and it wasn't all bad. There is a certain amount of mindless fun to be had in the repetitive nature of the combat. The spear weapon is cool, and the first time or two you get the stealth mode power-up is neat. Other than that, though, my main takeaway from the game was to be wary of licensed titles—a lesson that has served me well over the years. As an aside, the arcade *AvP*, which came a year later, is everything I wanted this one to be and is well-worth seeking out. –Dan Ryan

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

American Gladiators

PUBLISHER: GameTek.
DEVELOPER: Imagitec Design.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Extreme, 1–15 players (alternating, two-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

Inspired by the television series (1989–1996), *American Gladiators* lets players compete in seven events: Assault (aim a bazooka and fire tennis balls at a bulls-eye above the Gladiator across from you, viewed from behind your character); Human Cannonball (swing on a rope, retract your legs to form a human cannonball to knock your opponent off a pedestal); Joust (battle with padded sticks, viewed from the side); The Wall (use hand and foot holes to climb a wall); Atlasphere (while inside a metal sphere, score in any of the four pods around the top-down arena); Powerball (grab a ball and race to put it in guarded bins, top-down view); and The Eliminator (a side-view obstacle course with eight obstacle types: treadmill, hand bike, balance beam, cargo net, zip wire, hurdles, sprint, Gladiators). You can play a quick game or enter a tournament. Real Gladiators Gemini, Nitro, Turbo, Thunder, Laser, Ice, Blaze, Lace, Gold, and Zap are featured via digitized close-ups, but playable characters are homogenized. Also released for the NES (sans Atlasphere) and Genesis (sans Human Cannonball).

Notable Quotable:

"With its studio glitz, recurring bodybuilder characters who called themselves the Gladiators, and playground environment of red, white, and blue gym pads, *American Gladiators* made sports into a heightened form of escapism . . . The show was unabashed fast-food television: it wasn't good for you, but it tasted delicious. In their effort to take those pleasures and redo them for the Super Nintendo, GameTek and Imagitec, bizarrely, take that same fast food and remove the cheese. And the lettuce. And the fries. And the condiments, too. Everything is taken away until it's reduced to a salty, gray beef patty. The adaptation they come up with turns the series into a piece of underdeveloped, disastrous piffle . . . the controls virtually don't exist, and the player will often not figure them out until it's too late . . . grating music that barely even has a tune . . . simply one of the worst video games for the Super Nintendo, if not of the 1990s . . . like watching the original series on a TV with scrambled reception." –Bill Hensel (playingwithsuperpower.com)

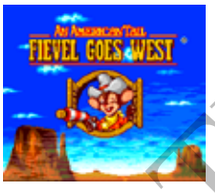
Schiffer Publishing

An American Tail:
Fievel Goes West

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft.
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

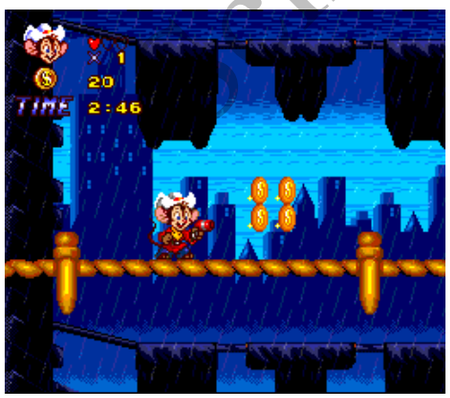
Based on the 1991 animated film, which was co-produced by Steven Spielberg, this linear side-scroller is strictly for beginners, but it is cute and fairly entertaining (if unoriginal). Players guide the titular mouse as he runs and jumps through five simple Old West levels (including the desert and atop a moving train), using a popgun and a water gun to shoot (right and left only) bats, buzzards, cow skulls, snakes, and other enemies, including such easy-to-defeat bosses as Cat R. Waul (who plans to round up all the mice and turn them into miceburgers), Chula, and One Eye.

The platforming action, in which Fievel jumps on such items and environments as barrels, brick pathways, balconies, houses, wagon wheels, and cacti, is a breeze, as is grabbing the various rudimentary items, which include health and weapon power-ups, continue icons, 1-ups, and invincibility. In certain areas, Fievel will float on the water in a tub and ride a hand car on a train track. An NES version was planned but never released. A follow-up of sorts, *An American Tail: Fievel's Gold Rush*, hit the Game Boy Advance in 2002.



Notable Quotable:

"*Fievel Goes West* starts off with some very cute music to make the player fall in love with the main character, but it loses its appeal quickly with poor gameplay. The control is there, but the interaction is lost somewhere in the game field. Too bad, though. The graphic rendition of the cute little mouse, as well as the other characters from the movie, is excellent, as is the soundtrack. Suited for younger players only." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1994)



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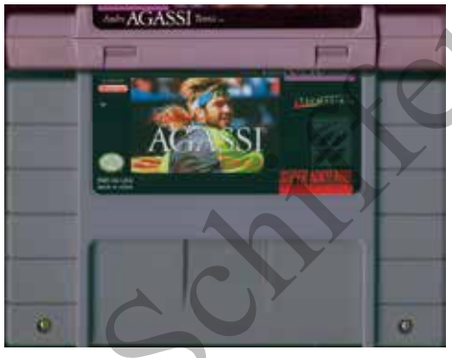
Andre Agassi Tennis

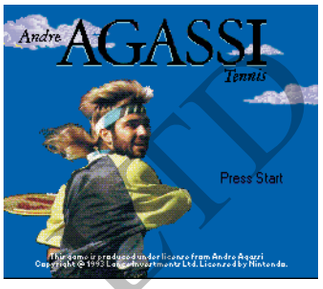
PUBLISHER: TecMagik.
DEVELOPER: Radiance Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Tennis, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

Thanks to choppy graphics and poor controls that exhibit a delayed reaction, *Andre Agassi Tennis* is a cumbersome, almost unplayable mess, especially in terms of timing and aiming shots, putting spin on the ball, and precise player movement. Gamers can play as Agassi himself or as one of seven fictional players (each accorded different attributes) on three court types: grass, clay, or American indoor. Standard tennis moves are available (lobs, slices, backhands, forehands, serves, lunges, and the like), as are singles, doubles, and three different modes of play: Practice (against a ball machine), Tournament, and Skins Tournament, the last of which grants gamers money for successful shots. Sound effects are minimal (ball hitting the racket and court), but an announcer is on hand to call out scores. The game is much different than its Genesis and Game Gear counterparts, which have a fourth court surface: hard.



Fun Fact:
In the manual for *Andre Agassi Tennis*, Agassi, who retired in 2006 after winning sixty career titles, is credited with giving such advice as "Develop the weapons and eliminate the errors" and "Focus on one match at a time, but keep the vision of the champion."

Notable Quotable:
"It starts off all very promising, some nice stills of Mr. Agassi to a funky slap bass jazz type thing followed by some functional menus . . . the sound is hardly used, no crowd noise and no music [during gameplay] means there is zero atmosphere . . . Players move quickly but with no accuracy, meaning you constantly miss the ball . . . Awful collision detection means that the wrong shot is often played . . . The different shots all appear to do the same thing . . . The only slightly redeeming feature is the hilarious doubles mode so that you and a mate can both shake your heads in disgust and attempt to throw your controllers out of the window." –Arcade Attack (www.arcadeattack.co.uk)



Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Animaniacs

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Pinky and the Brain have stolen an important movie script from Warner Bros., but Pinky accidentally dropped pages of the script at various sound stages on the studio lot, including Sci-Fi, Aquatic, Fantasy, and Adventure. On a mission to collect the pages (finishing the game is possible without finding all the pages, but you get the best ending if you locate the entire script), you control the trio of Yakko, Wakko, and Dot as they walk, dash, jump (over obstacles and on top of enemies), and pick up things to throw at enemies. You'll also perform such platformer staples as riding rafts and mine carts, and certain areas scroll automatically. You control one character while the other two follow along. By pressing the X button you can create a "short stack" of the characters for reaching higher areas.

When the character you are controlling gets hit, he or she gets captured in the Water Tower. Each character acts as a life, and when you continue a game you proceed with just one of the characters. Fortunately, you can collect coins throughout the levels. Each time you collect five, a slot machine across the bottom of the screen turns, restoring your captured character(s), making you temporarily invincible, or giving you an extra continue or more coins. Beware that certain combinations on the slot machine will make you lose coins. The platforming action scrolls to the side, but you can move toward and away from the screen as in a beat-'em-up game. Based on the animated series, which ran from 1993 to 1998, *Animaniacs* for the SNES is much different than the Game Boy and Genesis versions.

Insider Insight:
The first time I saw the *Animaniacs* cartoon on TV, I was hooked. The animated series had the old *Looney Tunes* vibe that I loved. I bought the audio CDs that were released at the time and quickly learned the words to "Be Careful What You Eat." But when I saw the game at Toys"R"Us, I was a little hesitant to buy it. Movie and TV ports were a mixed bag, but seeing the Konami logo gave me confidence. This was the first game I purchased brand new for the SNES, as money was tight in college. I could no longer hit my parents up for games as gifts, and cartridges were expensive. Luckily, it turned out to be a great investment as it quickly became my favorite. The graphics, sounds, and cutscenes were fantastic. The game was just plain fun to look at. Being a radio/TV major, I especially enjoyed the idea of running around the Warner Bros. lot. The movie references were perfect, and *Animaniacs* rose to the top as my go-to stress reliever.

When I think of the game now, nostalgia hits hard as it was the end of a gaming era for me. It was the last game I remember playing in the comfort of my parent's house, when life was easy, and I was just transitioning into a college kid. It was also the last game I played on my SNES before it got pushed aside when I graduated college and entered the real world. It was years before I got another system, and by then everything had switched to CD. Cartridges were a thing of the past. What I wouldn't give now to play one more game of *Animaniacs* on the floor of my parent's living room back in the mid-1990s. Thinking about how *Animaniacs* signified the end of my childhood gaming made me really glad I have the opportunity to relive those moments with my son now. He's only three, but he knows how to handle a controller like a pro. Playing with him is like being a kid again. –Sean Tiedeman

Archive Publishing LTD

Arcade's Greatest Hits:
The Atari Collection 1

PUBLISHER: Midway.
DEVELOPER: Digital Eclipse.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Genre Compilation, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1997.

This compilation features six nicely ported arcade favorites from the golden age of gaming. In *Asteroids* (1979), you pilot a triangular spaceship that rotates, thrusts, and shoots asteroids that break into smaller chunks. You also shoot big and small flying saucers that appear one at a time.*Battlezone* (1980) is a first-person tank shooter in which you fire at enemy tanks and missiles from inside an armored vehicle. A radar screen helps you sight and destroy the enemy. *Centipede* (1980), which is set in a magical mushroom forest, is a fixed-screen shooter in which you control a magic wand along the bottom quarter of the playfield, firing at multi-segmented centipedes as they work their way down. You'll also shoot jumping spiders, poisonous scorpions, and frenetic fleas. In *Missile Command* (1980), you maneuver a gun sight around the sky, firing at aircraft and descending missiles to protect three artillery bases and six cities.

Super Breakout (1978) has you controlling a *Pong*-like paddle along the bottom of the playfield, deflecting a bouncing ball into brick walls above. Bricks disappear when hit. In *Tempest* (1981), you maneuver a claw-shaped outer space vehicle that perches and crawls around the outer-edge lanes of a series of tube-like circles, rectangles, triangles, and other geometric shapes. As you whiz around each tube, you must shoot enemies that move toward your ship. The visuals in *Asteroids*, *Battlezone*, and *Tempest* are vector-style, and only *Battlezone* scrolls. Each game is a fun classic that holds up well, but the SNES D-pad is a relatively poor substitute for an arcade-style trackball (*Centipede*, *Missile Command*) or rotary controller (*Tempest*, *Super Breakout*). The superior PlayStation version supports dual analog and mouse control, and it includes a documentary featuring interviews with original Atari programmers. The excellent Saturn version features the documentary as well. Followed by *Arcade's Greatest Hits: The Atari Collection 2* (PlayStation).

Memories:
I grew up playing each of the games in this collection in the arcades, most notably The Land of Oz, Putt-Putt Golf and Games, and Malibu Grand Prix, all in Hurst, Texas (a suburb of Fort Worth). *Asteroids* was my favorite, and I mastered it to the point where I could play for hours on one quarter by leaving a small, slow asteroid, avoiding shooting it, and whizzing my ship up the screen while turning to blast the flying saucers as they came out one at a time. During this era, I rode my bike to school each day and would frequently stop by a convenience store near my junior high school that had *Asteroids* (along with *Pac-Man* and *Phoenix*). One evening I played a single game for more than four hours, only stopping because the store was getting ready to close—I still had a long row of extra ships in stock!

Memories:
Super Breakout is, of course, the sequel to *Breakout* (1976), one of the most important games in my personal gaming history. One day in 1976, when my brother and I were at The Land of Oz, which had many pinballs in addition to a few arcade cabs, they got in a *Breakout* machine, which absolutely blew my mind. I was well-acquainted with *Pong*, so the gameplay came naturally to me right away, but the concept of playing it solo while rebounding the ball against rows of bricks really resonated (making rows of things disappear continued with such games as *Space Invaders* and *Tetris*, both of which I love). That singular moment—a *Breakout* moment, you could say—was the beginning of when I started liking video games even more than my beloved pinball.

Super Breakout, which added a number of fun features (such as double paddles and downward progressing walls), only exacerbated my love for the brick-busting formula. I still enjoy *Breakout* and *Super Breakout* for the Atari 2600, thanks in part to that console's excellent paddle controllers, and I own a boxed copy of *Arkanoid* for the NES, complete with the Vaus controller—one of the prizes of my collection. I also enjoy such similar games as *Off the Wall* (arcade) and *Breakaway* (Arcadia 2001).

Insider Insight:
In 1997, classic video games were hard to come by. Most local arcades had closed, or worse—been transformed into heartbreaking centers for ticket redemption machines. Video game emulation was in its infancy, so when Midway released some of the most beloved coin-op hits from the golden age of arcade games for play at home, I was ecstatic! Six of Atari's finest were crammed into a single volume, including: the immensely popular space shooter *Asteroids*; the original death match war game *Battlezone*; the infestation of *Centipede*; *Missile Command*'s impending nuclear winter; the paddle, ball, and brick title *Super Breakout*; and my personal favorite . . . *Tempest*! –Michael Thomasson

Insider Insight:
It's no secret that I'm a huge Atari fan. From the moment I played the 2600, I fell in love, and the journey through the Atari ST, Lynx, and Jaguar only cemented this passion. Not just Atari's consoles, though. As a big arcade gamer, I was well aware of their extensive works in this field, which contains much of their finest work. So a collection like this is an absolute no-brainer for me—six legendary arcade games on one cartridge for the same price as a normal game? Shut up and take my money!

Every game in this collection is a true classic: titles I've spent more hours with than I care to count. Regarding the quality of the ports, Digital Eclipse made some slight adjustments to cater to the screen ratio, *Centipede* and *Super Breakout* being the most notable examples, but otherwise the conversions are nigh-on arcade perfect. They even replicated the vector-based visuals of *Tempest* and *Asteroids*!

Many people dismissed these games as old-hat when Midway released this collection in 1997, especially with it coming so late in the life of the SNES, but there's no doubt they have aged less than many other games on the system! –Kieren Hawken

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Arcana

PUBLISHER: HAL America.
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory.
GAME TYPE: First-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

Developed by the creators of *Kirby's Adventure*, *Arcana* is a magic-infused dungeon crawler with an unusual twist: the characters are represented as cards. The turn-based battles, which are limited in terms of animation, are fought via spirit cards (earth, wind, fire, and water), each of which has an attribute that is effective in attacks against enemies of certain other attributes. The chief protagonist is Rooks, who endeavors to master the art of the cards, but armor, shields, and weapons (wands, hammers, whips, axes, and swords) can be distributed to other members of the party, including Teefa (a healer and sorceress who can master the eleventh level Attribute spell), Salah (a magician), and Axs (an axe- and shield-wielding knight), among others. You'll visit The Village of Galia, Balnia Temple, Draven Pass, the home of Reinoll the Elder, The Ice Mine, The Village of Doraf, and Stavery Tower, along with inns, outfitters shops, and a spirit healer's tent. Known as *Card Master: Rimsalia no Fuuin* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"*Arcana* is essentially the game *Shining in the Darkness* should have been. The same gameplay remains in place: there's a central hub village where you can purchase weapons, stock up on items, and save your progress. The individual dungeons are dotted around a world map, with each having to be tackled in sequence. Enemy encounters are random and come without warning, consisting of turn-based combat involving your team of adventurers and multiple foes . . . The levels themselves showcase far more variety than those seen in *Shining in the Darkness*; instead of being exclusively confined to underground environments, *Arcana* places you in ice palaces, forests, and other locations. Although the general gameplay never changes, the graphical differences between these levels helps prevent things from becoming too stale, which is a considerable risk when you take into account the rather repetitive nature of the dungeon-crawling adventuring . . . The battle system doesn't offer up any massive shocks, but the use of elemental attributes brings some welcome strategy to the proceedings. It's the usual suspects—fire, wind, earth, and water—but consideration must be taken before dashing into a battle situation. It's even possible to summon an elemental spirit to become a member of your party and fight on your behalf." –Damien McFerran (www.nintendolife.com)

Insider Insight:

As someone who was raised on a steady diet of Genesis dungeon crawlers, I was the only one in my gaming circle that had any interest in *Arcana*. Most of my friends didn't like this PC-centric brand of RPG, preferring instead the kind of fare that made Square and Enix famous. I, on the other hand, loved this style of gameplay. Having braved both *Shining in the Darkness* and *Might and Magic II* on Sega's machine, I was eager for another dungeon romp, from wherever it may come.

I wish I could say that *Arcana* gave me the same sense of adventure and nervous anticipation those games did. It's not a bad game, but it's one that is definitely an acquired taste. For instance, the characters and enemies all being displayed on playing cards is weird at first, but it's easily assimilated. Despite the appearance, everything is turn-based like any standard console RPG of the era, and random battles are the norm. On its face, its unremarkable aesthetics make it seem forgettable compared to the more notable quest games out there.

To me, that is actually where the charm of *Arcana* lies. It's competent as an RPG, but what makes it notable is that it was one of the earliest dungeon crawlers released for the SNES in the West. At a time when we were all hungry for anything SNES (my friend bought and devoured *Ultraman*—seriously!), it somehow got overlooked by everyone I knew. I guess they saw the card visuals and assumed it was more like a board game than an RPG. It wasn't until two of my group came over one Sunday and saw me playing it that they finally learned what a neat little game it was. They loved the music, the engaging spirit card attacks, and the sheer size of the dungeons. Eventually, several of them bought the game when it had come down in price, and the majority still speak positively about *Arcana* today.

Perhaps that's what makes *Arcana* stand out in my mind, even after so many years. It pleases me that I managed to enlighten my friends to a game they would undoubtedly had missed otherwise. I still think of it every time I see card-based games, and I still find myself humming that main dungeon theme every so often. It's nice to know that some other people out there might be doing so as well, and that I had a little part in making that happen. –Ken Horowitz

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Ardy Lightfoot

PUBLISHER: Titus Software.
DEVELOPER: ASCII Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

In *Ardy Lightfoot*, you play an anthropomorphic, cat-like creature who uses his blue, round penguin friend name Pec as a weapon. As Ardy runs, jumps, climbs, and otherwise works his way through the game's ten (mostly) challenging levels of play (a jungle, a mining town, ruins, caves, a castle, a giant tree, the insides of a giant worm, etc.), Pec follows along and can be thrown at cute creature enemies. Pec doesn't affect certain enemies, but he does act as a hit point. If Ardy gets hit by an enemy, Pec will disappear, but he can be retrieved by you finding a chest. If Ardy gets hit while Pec is not in tow, he will die.

Ardy's other weapon is using his tail like a pogo stick (à la *DuckTales* for the NES). Ardy can also hide from enemies behind his cloak, push and pull obstacles, bounce on trampolines, avoid falling items (apples, blocks, and spikes), dodge and ride on flying spears, jump on buttons to make boxing gloves hit the enemy, collect stars (one hundred grants an extra life), ride a mine cart, ride in buckets and on conveyor belts, and use such items as bombs (to blow up obstacles blocking your way), keys, a hot air balloon, stones, and a mirror (which makes most enemies and projectiles harmless). Bosses to battle include a giant mole who throws his spiky hat and an owl ship captain who fires missiles, among others. Your overall objective is to find the seven pieces of the Sacred Rainbow. Levels are separated by an isometric world map. "To Be Continued" appears at the end of the game, but there was no sequel to this humorous, mascot-esque platformer. Known as *Arudi Raitofutto* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics totally make use of the SNES's palette, despite the fact that there are no Mode 7 graphics. The sprites are totally unique, and the levels each have their own charm. The mine sounds rambunctious, the forest sounds lively, the pirate ship sounds adventurous, and the ruins sound calm and mysterious. The soundtrack almost feels like it came from a movie! The only roadblocks that hinder this game are the precise gameplay and slightly ambiguous story." –SNES HUB (playingwithsuperpower.com)

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Arkanoid: Doh It Again

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Taito.
GAME TYPE: Ball-and-Paddle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1997.

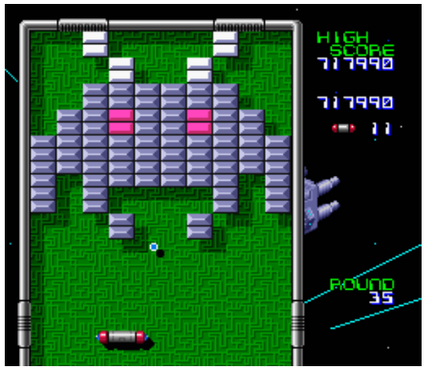
The console sequel to *Arkanoid*, which Taito released to the arcades in 1986, and *Arkanoid: Revenge of DOH*, which came out in 1987, *Arkanoid: Doh It Again* is an advanced take on the ball-and-paddle, brick-busting genre pioneered by Atari's *Breakout* (1976). Players guide a paddle-like scout ship horizontally along the bottom of the playfield, rebounding a bouncing ball off various formations of blocks up above. When a normal block gets hit, it will disappear, and sometimes it will release an energy capsule that will give your ship a special power, such as a force field, the ability to destroy multiple blocks, lasers (making the game a temporary shooter), or the ability to catch the ball until you want to release it. Other capsules generate eight balls from the original ball, make your ship wider, open a warp gate between levels, or give you an extra ship. No silver blocks, which must be hit several times, or gold blocks, which are indestructible, contain capsules. Clearing all the blocks (except for gold, of course) advances you to the next level.

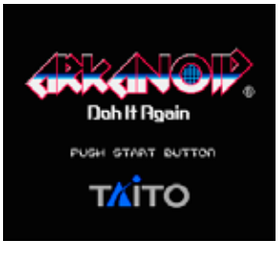
While *Doh It Again* lacks the rotary control of the original *Arkanoid* arcade game, and it didn't come with a special Vaus paddle controller like the one found with *Arkanoid* for the NES, it is compatible with the SNES mouse. This compensates somewhat, but it's not as fun or as precise as those games to control. Regardless, it's still a quality title, and it's a blast when your ship is weaponized and you can blow away the blocks like a mad gunner. Also neat are the bosses (which you must hit many times), the Edit Mode (which lets you design your own playfields), the two-player simultaneous option, and the block formation that looks like an alien from *Space Invaders*. Followed by several sequels, including *Arkanoid Returns* (various), *Arkanoid DS* (Nintendo DS), and *Arkanoid Live!* (Xbox 360).

Notable Quotable:

"With all these bells and whistles, you might expect this to be the best breakout game ever. Well, not quite. While many of the levels are well-designed, others are pretty dull. Yes, there are tons of power-ups, but many are just distracting, and their ubiquitous nature make this game far less challenging than it should be . . . *Arkanoid* is a decent effort, but it's not as madly addictive as I expected." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:
So there I was, working at FuncoLand in 1997, selling PlayStation and Nintendo 64 games left and right, when this little gem came waltzing into my life. This can't be stated boldly enough—I love *Arkanoid* with all my heart and soul. So with my Super NES slowly giving way to the flashy new 32- and 64-bit consoles, to have a brand new *Arkanoid* show up at my door, that can be controlled with the Super NES mouse no less, was an unfathomable joy. And what a fantastic iteration it turned out to be! *Arkanoid: Doh It Again* looks and plays spectacularly, and it's got boss fights, new power-ups, two-player co-op—what more could you want? I spent countless hours sitting on my floor with my Super NES Mouse's ludicrously short cable tethering me way too close to the TV, and I regret none of them. I still bust this one out from time to time. It may not be pushing the SNES's limits or anything, but sometimes games don't have to in order to be good. –Kris Randazzo





Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Art of Fighting

PUBLISHER: Takara.
DEVELOPER: Takara.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

Art of Fighting is a decent port of SNK's arcade/Neo Geo game (1992), which is a typical martial arts title of its type featuring a series of one-on-one fights. Characters in the SNES version don't get cuts and bruises, and the animation has a lower frame rate, but the camera still zooms in and out, and the fighting action remains largely intact. The one-player story mode lets gamers control Ryo (whose sister has been kidnapped) or Robert, while two-player action offers eight playable characters, each imbued with a variety of karate-based punches, kicks, throws, and special moves (burning knuckles, great ball of fire, and the like). Players can also dash, backdash, jump, crouch, block, and do wall-jump attacks. There are bonus rounds as well, including chopping ice blocks.

The arcade version introduced a spirit gauge under the fighter's life bar. When the character does a special move, the spirit gauge is depleted, and their special attacks become weaker. In addition, you can drain your opponent's spirit gauge by taunting them. The SNES game keeps this innovative feature intact. The game, which takes place in South Town (the same locale as *Fatal Fury*), isn't as hard-hitting as *Street Fighter II* or *Mortal Kombat*, but it's certainly playable. The Genesis version, which took a hit in the sound department, lacks the camera zoom feature and only has two difficulty levels (as opposed to eight in the SNES version). Known as *Ryūko no Ken* in Japan. Also released for the Neo Geo CD.

Notable Quotable:

"To make room for the zooming function and the huge sprites, a lot of detail has been taken out of the backgrounds, and the music, once echoing and smart, is now a bit weedy, but the playability is all there. If you're bored of [*Street Fighter II:*] *Turbo* and *Kombat*, *Art of Fighting* is the next place you should be looking for punching thrills." –*Nintendo Magazine System* (December 1993)

Insider Insight:
During the SNES era, fighting games dominated. SNK fighters, such as *Fatal Fury* and *World Heroes*, made the leap from arcades to home consoles. Some of their lesser-known fighters also made a home for themselves (so to speak), one of which is the crazy and highly original *Art of Fighting*. It had characters that took up a good eighty percent of the screen. With protagonists like Ryo and Robert, it mirrored other titles, but with a very simple style of fighting. Kick, punch, taunt, and special were the button layouts. One of my friends and I couldn't get enough of this title. During this time, I was hospitalized, and Blake Leftwich, one of my closest friends and fan of the game, sent me a get-well card. Instead of signing it with his name, he signed it as "Robert Garcia," one of the characters from the game. I'll never forget that. –Stephen Smith

Schiffer Publishing LTD

A.S.P. Air Strike Patrol

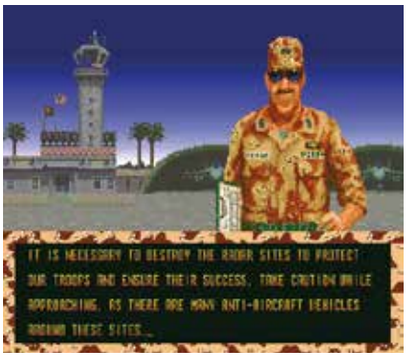
PUBLISHER: Seta U.S.A.
DEVELOPER: Opus.
GAME TYPE: Flight Combat Simulator, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

A jet fighter game with an isometric viewpoint, *A.S.P. Air Strike Patrol* puts the player, as an Air Force commander, at the helm of an A-10 or F-15 plane, trying to complete eight different timed missions, each with different endings based on your performance. Not only will you fire bullets and missiles to destroy enemy vehicles (tanks, planes, and the like) and critical targets, such as airfields, fuel pipelines, chemical weapon plants, and scud launchers, you must also be sure to work quickly, efficiently, and accurately while minimizing civilian casualties and property damage and managing your fuel and weapons supplies. The altitude at which you fly is fixed, but you can steer and adjust speed in real time.

Prior to taking off, you'll make a variety of selections, including the area to strike. The airborne action, which evokes EA's "Strike" series, but is more complex, takes place in the fictionalized Middle Eastern country of Zaraq (think Iraq), where you must oust an unnamed ruthless dictator (who resembles Saddam Hussein). A TV station called GNN (think CNN) reports on the fighting, which is accompanied by sketchy sound and voice effects and a scattershot jazzy musical score. Known as *Desert Fighter* in Europe and *Desert Fighter: Suna no Arashi Sakusen* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"Veteran players of these kinds of flying games will immediately take to it, but for others it will take practice to get the game control down (being a jet, you may have to make several passes over a target in order to destroy it). Still, the cinemas are well done (the GNN news is a nice touch), and there are plenty of weapons to use." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1994)



Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Axelay

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter/ Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

One of the best shooters for the SNES, *Axelay* puts players at the helm of a "stratafighter," which begins the game armed with three fully powered weapons: straight laser, round Vulcan, and macro missile. By destroying enemies (aliens, dragons, machines, and the like) and grabbing power-ups, players can equip other weapons (both air-to-air and air-to-ground), including a multi-direction needle cracker, a morning star (photons that revolve around the ship), cluster bombs, and wind lasers. After you choose your weapons from the select screen, a futuristic voice says, "Arms installation is complete, good luck."

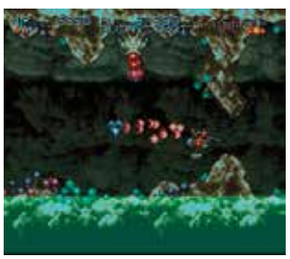
The action, which is supplemented by awesome tunes, takes place on six beautifully illustrated planets: Cumuluses (covered in clouds), Tralieb Colony, Urbanite, The Cavern, Sector 3 Lava Planet, and The Armada of Annihilation's Fortress. The game alternates between scrolling horizontally and vertically, the latter featuring an elevated view of behind your ship. The giant bosses, which are called "stage terminators," are especially cool. They include Arachnatron (a spider mech), T-36 Towbar (a walker droid), Regenertoid (a machine that grows when attacked and rains down firepower), Aquadon (a "floating fortress of devastation"), Wayler (a creature composed of lava and metal), and Veinion (which shoots homing lasers and is replaced by an amorphous blob boss when destroyed). If you like *Super R-Type*, you'll love *Axelay*. Known as *Akusurei* in Japan.

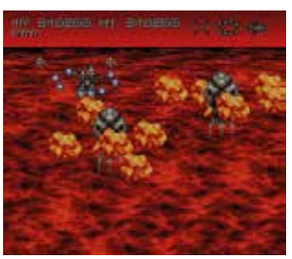
Fun Fact:
The support programmer for *Axelay* was Kazuhiko Ishida, who would go on to co-found Treasure with other Konami personnel.

Notable Quotable:
"Like any great shmup, *Axelay* has some large, crazy, memorable bosses, not the least of which is a huge, flaming ogre surrounded by moving lava who waves his multi-segmented arms at your ship while spitting reams of fireballs." –Racket Boy (www.racketboy.com)

Notable Quotable:
"*Axelay* is as good a game as *Gradius III* is bad. There's no slowdown, no flicker (with the exception of one end-of-level boss, but we're nitpicking) . . . fantastic Mode 7 graphic effects, and awesome sound. The levels switch between a conventional side-view of the action and a 'behind-the-ship' viewpoint that shows off the power of the Super NES." –*Super NES Games Secrets: Volume 3* (Prima Publishing, 1993, Rusel DeMaria and Zach Meston)

Insider Insight:
I first played this amazing shooter at the Consumer Software Group show in Japan in early 1992. I was so mesmerized by the graphics and the gameplay that I stood there playing until the final level, all while Ed Semrad took picture after picture for the next issue of *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. When we wrote about it in *EGM*, I honestly never thought the game would make it to the U.S. Luckily, Konami listened to their fans and the critics and brought this masterpiece home. I couldn't wait for the U.S. release, even though they were weeks apart. Fortunately, Ed was kind enough to pick up a copy for me during one of his many trips to Japan. I still have that copy in my collection today. I can also remember being thrilled to find out that there was an official soundtrack CD available in Japan published by King Records. I loved the music in *Axelay*, and some consider it one of the best soundtracks the Super NES has to offer. –Martin Alessi





Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Ballz 3D

PUBLISHER: Accolade.
DEVELOPER: PF Magic.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

A button-masher with a well-rounded approach (so to speak), *Ballz 3D* features eight playable fighters—Boomer, Bruiser, Crusher, Divine, Kronk, Tsunami, Turbo, and Yoko—each comprised of colored spheres (or "balls," if you will). Each character is rated according to twelve different attributes (speed, charge attacks, missile attacks, aerial attack damage, punch damage, kick damage, and the like), and each can pull off a variety of punches, kicks, and special moves, including dives, tsunamis, spins, charges, slams, taunts, flying phlegm, somersaults, and more. Characters can even morph into other characters.

The game offers fifteen futuristic fighting arenas, each with a background scoreboard depicting semi-humorous text commentary and insults, such as "administer smackies," "nibble some knuckle," and "suck sidewalk." The characters themselves are humor-based as well, ranging from a superhero to a ballerina to a jumping clown to a farting (!) gorilla. Bosses to battle include Guggler (an ostrich), Bounder (a kangaroo), T-Wrecks (a large dinosaur), Lamprey (a genie), and The Jester (who can disassemble himself and move around the floor). Quirky sound effects add to the strangeness of the game. Also released for the Genesis. Called *Ballz 3D: The Battle of the Ballz* in Europe. Followed by *Ballz: The Director's Cut* (3DO).

Notable Quotable:

"Tired of the same ol' fighting game? *Ballz* definitely wins originality points for its unique fighting perspectives, hilarious characters, and original special attacks. The graphics are very clean, and the control is right on par. However, the eight characters are limited in what they can do, so the game gets tiresome after a short while." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1994)

Fun Fact:

During the intro, The Jester juggles balls and says, "Think you can defeat The Jester . . . you gotta play Ballz." The intro to the Genesis version kept the edgier double entendre taunt that PF Magic originally programmed: "Think you can defeat The Jester . . . you gotta *have* Ballz." Ah, those family-friendly Nintendo execs.

Insider Insight:

After *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat* hit the streets, fighting games were all the rage. Most were a "me-too" money-grab offering nothing new. *Ballz*, however, was very fresh at the time and gave the tired genre new bounce. It wasn't truly three-dimensionally rendered, but pseudo-3D in design by some clever programming tricks which made it that much more impressive. I vividly remember thinking how amazing it was that the designers could create such unique fighters as a ballerina, bodybuilder, caveman, circus clown, monkey, rhinoceros, and sumo wrestler from only a combination of spherical shapes. They had such character and personality. The bosses were over-the-top, too: a court jester, kangaroo, genie, and ostrich, along with the T-Wrecks dinosaur.

Nintendo neutered the game's "gotta have Ballz" tagline to "gotta *play* Ballz," but the editing didn't fool anyone. My friends and I knew exactly what they were implying as we button-mashed the SNES control pad and pummeled each other.–Michael Thomasson

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Barbie: Super Model

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Tahoe Software.
GAME TYPE: Multi-Genre Game, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1994.

This auto-scrolling game has four short, shallow, linear levels, in which Barbie progresses across the screen, collecting items (for bonuses and extra chances) and dodging such obstacles as beach balls, cars, pedestrians, seagulls, snowballs, and Frisbees. You can speed up and slow down and move up and down. Each level has a different theme. Barbie drives a convertible in Hollywood, roller skates in Hawaii, walks in the snow during a vacation in Vail, and rides her bike in New York City.

The action scenes are interspersed with memory mini-games. You'll practice Barbie's moves for a fashion show, and then perform those moves from memory, and you'll view a magazine cover, and then go to a makeup mirror where you'll match Barbie's hairstyle, earrings, eyeshadow, and lip and nail color to the cover. There are two difficulty levels: junior model (easy) and super model (hard). Barbie moves slowly, and the action is limited (she can't jump or use weapons, for example), making the cartridge strictly for younger gamers. Also released for the Genesis. A Sega Game Gear version was planned but canceled mid-development.

Notable Quotable:

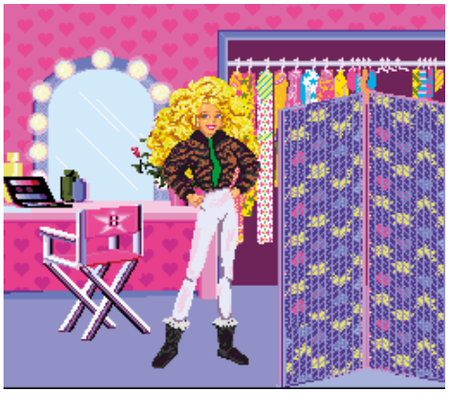
"The graphics and sound aren't top quality and the action is very slow. Barbie's car crawls down the highway and she leisurely skates down the beach. Unless you're a novice, the gameplay is too simplistic. But, hey, if you're looking for a gift for your little sister and Barbie's her best bud, this cart may just be the ticket. Then again, maybe not." –*GamePro* (March 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Barbie has been a fashion icon in the form of a doll since her launch in 1959. Manufactured by the American toy company Mattel, she's undergone a variety of body types and careers. None of these have satisfied detractors who claim this doll ruins the chances of young girls aspiring to anything worthwhile. Statistically, that is crap. Girls have been just fine. The only valid complaint is that Barbie video games seem to pander to stereotypes and under-deliver on potential." –8-bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Controlling Barbie is never really an issue, as it never really happens. Buttons generally just change her clothes or colors . . . The driving section is just responsive enough to keep you from hitting other cars, and the runway section is like a poor gal's *Dance Dance Revolution*, as you're simply required to hit one of two buttons when Barbie reaches a certain point on the floor . . . this game retailed for $60 when it came out. That's almost impossible to imagine. No one, and I mean no one, will get any long-term enjoyment out of this game, and the only people who would are the young girls to which the game is targeted—and even they will get bored after just a few rounds . . . It's a showcase of the license, nothing more." –Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)



Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

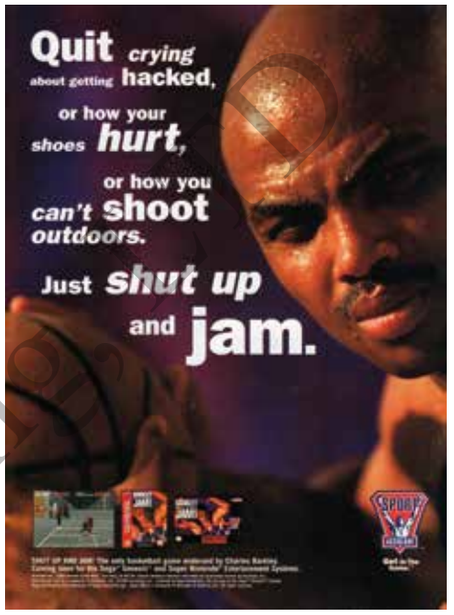
Barkley: Shut Up and Jam!

PUBLISHER: Accolade.
DEVELOPER: Accolade.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

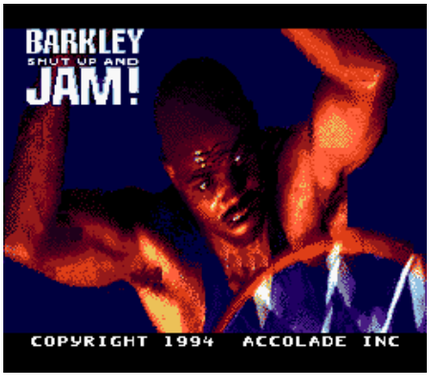
Featuring digitized voice effects (which are pretty scratchy) by Charles Barkley, The Round Mound of Rebound himself, *Barkley: Shut Up and Jam!* isn't nearly as good as *NBA Jam*, but it offers a street version (complete with graffiti and chain nets) of the same type of arcade-style, two-on-two action, including high-flying monster dunks and reverse 360 jams. There are no refs, so players can get away with pushing and shoving, and games take place on seven different street ball courts in eight different cities: Phoenix, Miami, Chicago, Oakland, Houston, Watts, Brooklyn, and Seattle.

Gamers can play as Barkley or as one of fifteen street all-stars, each rated according to twos, threes, dunks, rebounding, steals, and speed. A Tournament Mode is available, as is the ability to play for a certain point total or against the clock. Also released for the Genesis. Known as *Barkley's Power Dunk* in Japan. Followed by *Barkley: Shut Up and Jam 2* (Genesis).

Memories:
I grew up a huge fan of the Philadelphia 76ers, idolizing Julius "Dr. J" Erving for his high-flying dunks, fancy finger rolls, cool personality, and all-around awesomeness. When the Sixers selected Charles Barkley fifth in the 1984 NBA draft, I didn't know what to think of Dr. J's new teammate at first, but I grew to appreciate the relatively short forward's mad rebounding skills, powerful drives to the bucket, and animated personality. He later played for the Phoenix Suns and Houston Rockets. Nowadays, I enjoy Barkley's oft-amusing commentary on TNT's *Inside the NBA*. However, despite my affection for "The Chuckster," *NBA Jam* is my jam, not this game.



Notable Quotable:
"For a game produced a year after *NBA Jam*, everything looks blocky and unrefined in comparison. The street courts are comprised of horrible, massive, four-shade grey pixels. The sprites too are less well-drawn than in *NBA*, with the particularly amusing side-view of Sir Charles (where he looks like a crazy bald man with a monobrow) being an unwanted highlight. The action feels stunted, and the game is ridiculously easy. You can . . . shoot three-pointers all day long . . . The terrible sound and repetitive music are the rancid cherries on top of a woeful cake." – ArcadeAttack (www.arcadeattack.co.uk)



Publisher Proof

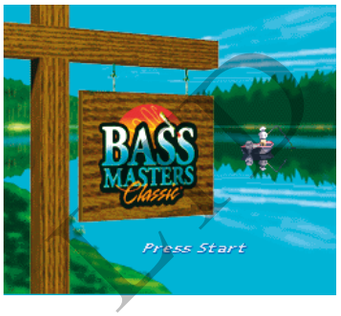
BASS Masters Classic

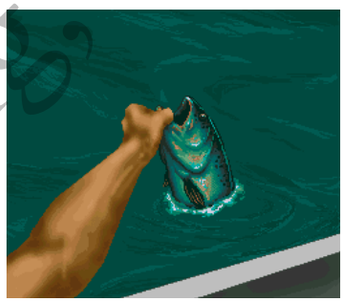
PUBLISHER: Malibu Games.
DEVELOPER: Black Pearl Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Fishing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

Endorsed by the Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (B.A.S.S.), *BASS Masters Classic* lets armchair anglers fish in four different lakes: Skull, Monkey, Deborah, and Mosquito. Tournaments consist of three days of fishing, and the goal is to catch large bass while avoiding carp and trout. After a day at the lake, the five largest bass the player caught are weighed and compared to the other fisherman's catches. While players pilot the boat around the lake, the action is viewed from overhead. After the line has been cast, the view switches to the side, with the gamer trying to lure fish with bait. Players are given a variety of options in the following categories: rod, reel, fish finder, boat engine, and bait (propeller, grub, popper, crank, worm, and spinner). Temperature, time of day, water clarity, and other factors can affect the ability of players to fish well. The game features nine different characters, including Bonnie B. Wild and Sammy "Sonar" Simpson. Also released for the Genesis and Game Boy Color.

Notable Quotable:

"The game has good graphics . . . The replay is there with the allure and hopes of finding a lunker fish . . . The ease of use and yet good depth add to a fun experience that isn't too hard for anyone to play." –GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)

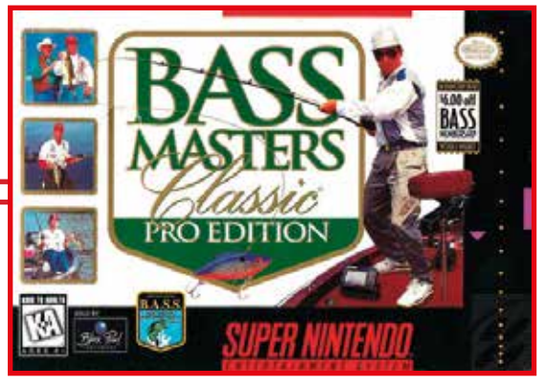




Schiffer Publishing

BASS Masters Classic:
Pro Edition

PUBLISHER: Black Pearl Software.
DEVELOPER: Black Pearl Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Fishing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1996.



An enhanced version of *BASS Masters Classic*, *BASS Masters Classic: Pro Edition* plays a lot like its progenitor, but does include some new features, including the ability to play as six different pro bass anglers: George Cochran, Shaw Grigsby Jr., Gary Klein, Tom Mann Jr., Dee Thomas, and Kevin VanDam. You can select from six amateurs as well. There are five different lakes this time around (as opposed to four), and they are larger in size. Other enhancements include: smarter computer A.I., better graphics, new music, more fishing equipment, difficulty level selection, and a zoom function. Another addition is product placement, such as name-brand boat motors. As in the first game, you purchase lures, worms, rods, fishing line, engines, reels, and fish finders in the bait shop. You can also get fishing advice in the shop. Endorsed by the Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (B.A.S.S.), this game was also released for the Genesis. Followed by *Bass Masters 2000* (N64).

Notable Quotable:

"The fishing controls have been tweaked, making it a lot easier to actually catch fish . . . The casting controls, however, are still worthless. . . . Audio is the same, but now we can change 'radio stations.' Unfortunately, the radio only has two stations, and they both play the same song. Graphics had a bit of an overhaul . . . more detailed . . . *BASS Masters Classic: Pro Edition* is a shameless excuse to cash in on product placement, but they did make some improvements." –Classically Trained Nub (classicallyown3d.blogspot.com)

Schiffer Publishing

Bassin's Black Bass

PUBLISHER: HOT-B USA.
DEVELOPER: Starfish.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Fishing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Hit the fishin' holes—Green Valley Lake, Onyx River, Bronze Lake, and Bluestone Lake—with fisherman extraordinaire Hank Parker in *Bassin's Black Bass*, where you'll compete in four tournaments: Local Amateur Tournament, Amateur Bass Championship, Pro Bass Championship, and Bassin' World Championship. You can select from sixteen different lures, each with its own attributes. For example, the frog bait slides easily through lily pads while the noisy bait creates a splash that attracts the lunkers. You can catch a variety of fish with varying traits, but only the three species of black bass (largemouth, smallmouth, and spotted) can be weighed in and kept in the live well.

To excel in the game, you should consider weather conditions, how far (and in what style) you want to cast the reel, and how powerfully you want to reel the fish in. Other options, features, and variables to consider include line tension and slack, water temperature, lure position and color, and which side you wish to face when reeling in a fish. After you get a bite, you must fight the fish, using techniques such as swinging the rod left or right or pulling up quickly on the rod to set the hook. A color meter will show you the strength level of the fish or the angler. A lake map screen provides you with an overhead view of the boat on the lake while a casting screen is where the actual fishing takes place. When it's time to weigh in, you must maneuver your boat back to the dock. The top three anglers will get special recognition.

Known in Japan as *Super Black Bass 2* (in which you *don't* compete against Hank Parker), *Bassin's Black Bass* offers a realistic fishing simulation with solid controls, nice graphics, varied conditions, and lots of replay value (though two or three more lakes would've been nice). Hot-B has produced numerous other fishing titles, including *The Black Bass* (NES), *The Blue Marlin* (NES), *Super Black Bass* (SNES), *Black Bass: Lure Fishing* (Game Boy, Game Boy Color), *Black Bass with Blue Marlin* (PlayStation), and *Super Black Bass Fishing* (DS).

Notable Quotable:

"Here's something you fishermen have been looking for. *BBB* is one exceptional fishing game. It's easy to get into and it doesn't rely on technical features of catching a bass. The moment you get on the lake, you're sure to catch a bass in no time. Great animations of fish swimming, and the sequences of catching a fish are very realistic. Very addictive game." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1994)

Sniffer Publishing

Batman Forever

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Probe Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

A widely derided game, *Batman Forever* lets players control a digitized Batman or Robin through eight nicely rendered levels based on locations from Joel Schumacher's critically lambasted movie from 1995: Arkham Asylum, Second Bank of Gotham City, The Circus, Two-Face's Hideout: Warehouse, Ritz Gotham, Abandoned Subway Station, Wayne Manor/ Destroyed Batcave, and Claw Island. Each hero can walk, jump, crouch, roll, somersault, and cape-glide (when jumping or falling), along with performing such fighting moves (some of which evoke *Mortal Kombat*) as block, back attack, sweep, uppercut, grab enemy, and low and high punches and kicks. There are plenty of Bat gadgets to use as well (varying by character), including Batarangs, a grappling hook, an extending staff, smoke pellets, flash pellets, tranquilizer darts, slippery goo, sticky goo, a Bat bola, a sonic blast weapon, and an electro staff prod. Helpful items to pick up include extra time, Riddler boxes (tips), and Two-Face coins (extra energy or lives).

In two-player mode, gamers can cooperate or compete as they work their way through the levels, platforming, battling bad guys (including thugs, Two-Face, Riddler, and Sugar and Spice), and solving puzzles (such as hidden switches that move background objects). The Genesis version has better controls and lacks the load screens of its SNES counterpart.

Notable Quotable:

"*Batman Forever*'s characters are large and digitized, but that hurts the two-player mode since you're constantly getting in your partner's way . . . The stop-motion animation isn't bad, but Acclaim clearly did not use the actors from the movie. Robin has a sizeable gut, and Batman has a sack of potatoes in his pants! But the game's problems run far deeper than that. The glossy, full-color manual never bothers to explain how to climb up and drop down through holes in the floor. As a result, it took me two FAQ pages to figure out how to get past the first stage! The game expects you to climb onto unseen ledges and drop down into areas not visible to the eye. *Batman Forever* makes a mockery of common sense. Why would destroying a safe cause a door to open on the lower level? There are times when you'll find yourself walking (and fighting) on thin air! The darker levels feature nice gothic scenery, but brighter levels (like the circus) look cheesy. Another annoying thing is having to wait for the game to load as you stare at 'HOLD ON.' This only lasts a few seconds, but this is a cartridge for Pete's sake! From top to bottom, *Batman Forever* is a complete mess." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:

"Hidden Surprises." "Incredible 3D Graphics." "125 Awesome Attacks."

These were some of the bullet points highlighted in an epic commercial for *Batman Forever*, culminating with the tagline, "The Real Game Begins." Seeing that commercial made me, an eleven-year-old kid who wore his *Batman Forever* sweat pants and Chris O'Donnell Robin T-shirt, want the game badly. I remember browsing through the *Consumers Distributors* catalog, a publication in Canada, simply admiring the box art alone and waiting for the game's release.

The first time I rented *Batman Forever*, I also rented *Killer Instinct*. I spent most of the weekend playing *Killer Instinct*, but I do remember getting to maybe the third or so screen in *Batman Forever*, and between myself and my brother, we couldn't figure out how to progress. It was only a few hours before we had to return the game that we figured out that we needed to use the grappling hook, which was activated by awkwardly hitting "select" and then pressing "up." I was very happy to see this control issue addressed when James Rolfe, the Angry Video Game Nerd, did his review of the game in 2008.

It's easy to dismiss the infamous nature of *Batman Forever* today, but before it was released, there really wasn't a bad Batman video game if you exclusively played Nintendo consoles, thanks to Sunsoft and Konami. Without knowing it awkwardly forced a 2D fighter control scheme onto a side-scrolling brawler, I had anticipated only the "realest" Batman game ever with graphics like that in one of my favorite games, *Mortal Kombat* (which I probably shouldn't have been playing at my young age). –Blair Farrell

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Batman Returns

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

A spectacular game in the mold of such fondly remembered beat-'em-ups as *Final Fight* and *Streets of Rage*, *Batman Returns* follows (more or less) the storyline of Tim Burton's 1992 film. Players guide the Dark Knight Detective through seven fun-filled stages: Ambush in Gotham Plaza, Battle in the Streets of Gotham City, On the Prowl, The Penguin's Trap, To the Batmobile (a driving level with low, behind-the-car perspective), Circus Train, and The Penguin's Lair.

To battle the thugs, clowns, jugglers, skull-faced bikers, supervillains (Penguin, Catwoman), and other enemies he'll encounter, Batman can punch, kick, and perform such special moves as a cape sweep, a test tube toss, a flying jump kick, and a flying attack. When he picks up an enemy, he can punch 'em in the gut, throw them to the ground, or toss them through a background window or fence (for example). He can even bash two bad guys' heads together! (Yes, this is as fun as it sounds.)

Of course, Bats can use gadgetry as well, including Batarangs, a spear gun (with retractable cable), and chemical explosives. He can even take the wheel of a disc-shooting Batmobile, which is something he can't do in Sega's darker, more platform-oriented Genesis game of the same name. *Batman Returns* was also adapted (in varying forms) for the NES, Sega CD, Game Gear, and Lynx. The Master System version was only released overseas.

Memories:
When Tim Burton's original *Batman* movie hit theaters in 1989, I was super excited. Not only was I a huge fan of Batman comic books (and the character in general), I was eager to see the Dark Knight taken seriously on the big screen. During this era, many non-comic book readers who were oblivious to Frank Miller's *Dark Knight Returns* still associated Batman with the campy Adam West television show from the 1960s. Fortunately, Burton's gothic masterwork made Batman a dark avenger of the night, something he's been for the most part (at least in the comics) since he was introduced to the world by Bob Kane and Bill Finger in *Detective Comics* #27. I was excited by Burton's follow-up, *Batman Returns*, as well, but I had (and still have) mixed opinions on it. I loved Michelle Pfeiffer's darkly sexy portrayal of Catwoman, but Danny Devito's drooling, disgusting Penguin was more gross than menacing. In contrast, my view of the *Batman Returns* video game is that of an unqualified success.

Insider Insight:
Do you know how many distinct adaptations of Michael Keaton's second Batman movie hit the market in the early '90s? Seven! And that's not even counting the crappy Tiger Electronics LCD handheld. After playing the Genesis version of *Batman Returns* and its Sega CD enhancement that added Batmobile levels, I pretty much had my fill at the time—which is a shame, because Konami's SNES effort would prove itself to be the superior version, by far.

It wasn't until doing research for my book, *WRONG! Retro Games, You Messed Up Our Comic Book Heroes*, in 2014 that I'd finally gotten around to realizing that *Batman Returns* for SNES not only boasts some quality beat-'em-up gameplay, but it also represents its source material better than just about any superhero game released up to its time. In addition to great controls and some nice touches (awesome breaking glass!), it also has an overall aesthetic that puts you in the Tim Burton-verse better than anything out there.

It all starts with the SNES's superior color palette and sound—only the Super Star Wars games challenge its adapted film score of a soundtrack. And whereas the beat-'em-up formula often feels like a lazy choice for superhero games, it's almost like Burton had "Dark Knight goes *Final Fight*" in mind when he created his diverse menagerie of killer clowns, stilted showmen, and other deviants in the Red Triangle Circus Gang. Burton even did some level design! Well, not really, but while most games based on movies stretch their boundaries for the sake of gameplay (Luke on a Jawa-slaughtering rampage, I'm lookin' at you!), just about every level in *Batman Returns* equates to a scene from the film—I especially love how you can grapple the wall behind the clown terrorizing Selina Kyle, but the only way you know to do this is by remembering that it's part of the movie. It's obvious that Konami valued its source material as much as it valued creating one of the best single-player beat-'em-ups of its day. Play it now as it may even hold up better than the movie. –Chris Baker

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Battle Blaze

PUBLISHER: American Sammy.
DEVELOPER: Aicom Corporation/ Electronics Application Co.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Set during the pre-industrial Great World in the land of Virg, *Battle Blaze* is a one-on-one fighter with six selectable fantasy warriors, each of whom can pull off four to six special moves. Kerrel, a swordsman who has vowed to avenge his father and destroy the Dark Lord, does a dragontail slice, flying spinkick, kneeling thrust, and power thrust. Shnouzer can transform into a beast (and change back), along with doing a toe-blade attack, thunder smash, and thunder claw. Adrick wields a dark blade and can do a double slice, an avalanche, a blizzard cut, and an arc blast. Lang, who is Kerrel's twin, does a dragonfang slice, a whirlwind kick, a kneeling stab, and a power cut. Twin dagger-toting Tesya does a reverse kick, a boot to the head, a kiss of doom, and a crescent spark. Lord Gustoff, a half orc with a mace, performs a lunge kick, the hammer, an iron uppercut, a reverse lunge, and a flying mace. Each character can jump and do such basic moves as crouch, kick, and low and high strike.

As Kerrel, you will battle each of the warriors in The Hero story mode. Or you can duke it out against a friend as any hero in The Battle option. In Hero mode, you'll eventually face a clawed demon boss called Autarch (who you can play as if you enter the correct cheat code). Backgrounds in the game include trees, mountains, ancient Rome-type buildings, and the like. Originally scheduled for release in 1993 (a series of delays held it back until January of 1994), *Battle Blaze* is based on American Sammy's 1992 arcade game.

Notable Quotable:

"You're stuck playing as the totally generic Conan wannabe Kerrel in story mode . . . fighting in *Battle Blaze* is . . . not very good. The overall movement of your character feels like he's underwater . . . jumping is assigned to an actual face button and not the fighting game standard of up on the d-pad . . . so get ready for some really awkward jumping attacks . . . You also only get one attack button besides the jump button, so don't go in thinking you're going to need to learn multiple punches and kicks since your one attack button is responsible for literally every attack you can do in the game . . . Special moves are at least simple to pull off, with most being pressing the attack button while pressing left, right, up, or down on the d-pad, though none are very impressive . . . most of the special moves look like normal attacks . . . pressing back to block is in the game, but only seems to work when it wants to." –RetroVania (www.retrovania.net)

Insider Insight:

I had a friend who was CrAzY about fighting games. He didn't care about much else, but whenever I obtained a new fighter, John Stetzor could be found in my Savannah apartment getting his fix. He particularly liked the coin-op port of *Battle Blaze*, although neither of us had ever encountered it in the arcade. I think what really pulled him into this particular title was the addition of weapons—either that or the men sporting loin cloths! All joking aside, most fighters of the time consisted of repeated punch and kick actions, whereas *Battle Blaze* introduced weapons such as daggers, knives, maces, morning stars, and broadswords.

The game's story told the tale of a son avenging his father's death against a phantom demon in the fabled Tournament of Champions. But, let's not fool ourselves--the plot never motivated either John or myself to play, we just wanted to see who could best whom. For the record, it was John. It was always John. He was the King of Fighters! –Michael Thomasson

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Battle Cars

PUBLISHER: Namco.
DEVELOPER: Namco.
GAME TYPE: Demolition/Combat Racing/Futuristic Racing, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

Featuring the type of behind (and slightly above) the car perspective popularized by such arcade classics as *Turbo* (1981) and *Pole Position* (1982), *Battle Cars* looks like a cross of sorts between *F-Zero* and *Super Mario Kart*, but it lacks the fame of those games. You control one of three different vehicle types: a spiked car, a hotrod, or a formula-1-style racer, each available in a variety of colors. The action is set in a war-torn future, where you race on tracks in nine cities, including Newtroit, Meltdown, and New Atlantis. There are thirty-two tracks in all (rotating is achieved via Mode 7 effects), pitting you against such *Death Race 2000*-type drivers as Metal Head Mike, Dirty Knuckle Ned, and Doctor Diana.

After racing cross-country, you'll compete in a two-lap circuit against a boss car. Your car, which can pull off such special moves as bootleg turns and side swipes, is outfitted with weapons (disks, missiles, and grenades) that can be upgraded (with money earned from races) for speed and accuracy. The cars themselves can be enhanced with such attributes as superior shocks, tires, and jumping ability.

Notable Quotable:
"This big, bad, ballistic driving game takes the best of racing favorites and adds tons of other options. Its blow-up-the-other-guy fun is definitely a must-play for racing fans." –*Game Players* (October 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"This is a great game for race fans who want a change of pace from formula-1 cars or for driving game fans who want a little futuristic fantasy in their lives. Casual gamers might also want to check this one out just for the speed." –*GamePro* (October 1993)

Retrofit Publishing LLC

Battle Clash

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Intelligent Systems.
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1992.

Set in a dystopian future, *Battle Clash* is one of the better Super Scope games. Armed with a laser cannon, players fire at a series of battle mechs (called Standing Tanks), including Garam (quick and bulky with powerful shots), Scarab (powerful armor), Lorca (moves quickly, has a sonic spin attack), Ivan (huge but slow), Artemis (equipped for aerial maneuvering), and Baron (fast and heavily armored). Each battle mech has certain weak spots that must be targeted, and you should avoid their attacks. Battles, which are viewed from a first-person perspective, take place in New York, the Andes, Cairo, London, Babel, Oceana, and Kyoto.

Holding the trigger on the Super Scope emits rapid fire while resting for a time charges the gun to shoot energy bolts. Other weapons and items you can use include bombs, plasma bombs, homing lasers, shields, a v-system (shields, plus increased power and speed), an aiming cursor, and turbo fire (which can block enemy projectiles). Detailed graphics and level-specific music add to the fun. Known as *Space Bazooka* in Japan. Followed by *Metal Combat: Falcon's Revenge*.

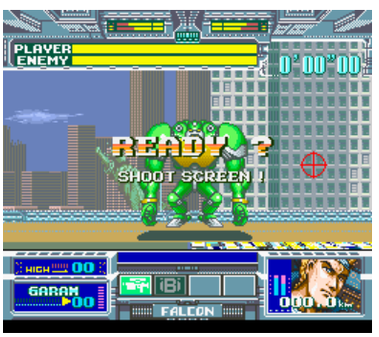
Notable Quotable:

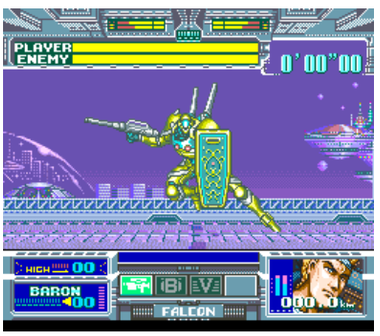
"Using a play style that is more akin to *Street Fighter* with 1 VS 1 Mech Suits battles in different parts of the world, *Battle Clash* could almost be considered unique in this genre. You play as a young pilot who is accompanying Mike while trying to destroy the evil Anubis and his organization by targeting the six chiefs one at a time. These 'chiefs' as the game calls them are pretty generic and don't do much to make you want to destroy them other than be pointlessly cocky. The game is difficult, and using hacks can still lead to a challenging battle. Utilizing some nice visuals and even visible battle damage on the opponents, *Battle Clash* can provide at least an hour of entertainment, but the story still leaves a lot to be desired." –Retro Gaming Mag (retrogamingmagazine.com)

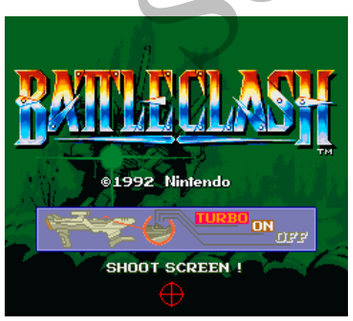
Insider Insight:

My sister and I were so stoked to get the Super Scope. When we put that cannon on our shoulders, the moles in *Mole Patrol* were toast. But even before the novelty of the *Super Scope 6* pack-in cart had time to wear off, we got ourselves a copy of *Battle Clash*, and we didn't stop playing until Thanatos was destroyed, or we needed more AA batteries.

It took me a while to realize it, but *Battle Clash* is almost like *Punch-Out!!* with giant mechs and guns, and my being a HUGE *Punch-Out!!* fan, it's no wonder this game resonated with me so much. There's this one stage toward the end of the game where you have to fight against this crazy-fast mech named Valius, and I swear it took us what felt like weeks to get past him. And when you're fighting Baron and he throws that shield?—still one of the coolest-looking sequences on the SNES. The sequel, *Metal Combat: Falcon's Revenge*, was pretty great, too. What I wouldn't give for a modern take on this series! –Kris Randazzo







Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Battle Grand Prix

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft.
DEVELOPER: KID Corp.
GAME TYPE: Formula-1/Indy Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

Unlike most games of the era, *Battle Grand Prix*, an F-1 racer with a nice variety of options, sports an old-school overhead viewpoint, which in this particular case makes it difficult to see oncoming obstacles. The playfield is split-screen, even in one-player mode, exacerbating the problem by shrinking the field of view. Arrows flashing indicate the direction of curves up ahead, and this helps somewhat.

Players select from forty different drivers, twenty-four different racing teams, and three modes of Grand Prix circuits. Cars, which are rated according to such attributes as handling, top speed, and acceleration, can be customized in terms of suspension, steering, brakes, transmission, tires, and engine. Sometimes it's necessary to make pit stop breaks for repairs and to refuel. There are three levels of difficulty—beginner, pro, and expert—and four modes of play: Survival (finish at or lower than a certain position to continue to the next race), Champion, VS, and Slot (automatic steering). Overall, the game has decent graphics and sounds, fast action, plenty of challenge, and a good dose of realism (there's rain, along with courses varying from concrete to blacktop), but the limiting viewpoint doesn't do players any favors.

Notable Quotable:

"There's much about *Battle Grand Prix* that is disappointing. Most immediately noticeable is its similarities to *Cyber Spin*. The two games are more or less completely interchangeable. Sure, *Battle Grand Prix* has a modern aesthetic instead of futuristic and features a brake button instead of a boost, but that's kind of it . . . *Battle Grand Prix* isn't a bad game, especially if you want to tune cars or have a multiplayer experience. But if you want a relaxed solo racing experience, you should choose *Cyber Spin* every time." –Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Battletoads/Double Dragon:
The Ultimate Team

PUBLISHER: Tradewest.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

A worthy entry in the Battletoads series, *Battletoads/Double Dragon* is a dream team matchup of Zits, Rash, and Pimple (the Battletoads) with twins Billy and Jimmy Lee (of the Double Dragons). The gameplay and humor evoke *Battletoads* (as opposed to *Double Dragon*), with our heroes battling the combined armies (punks, robot soldiers, and the like) of the Dark Queen and the Shadow Boss across the top of the massive Colossus space ship, in the bowels of said ship, and atop a missile headed straight for Earth. The Toads unleash over-the-top big punches and kicks and head-butts and slams while the Dragons use various martial arts techniques. Both types of heroes run, jump over obstacles, use a bo staff-type weapon (which can be picked up after you defeat a pair of legs), rappel down shafts, throw dynamite, drive a speeder bike and a space pod, swing across chasms via a turbo rope, and avoid such obstacles as mines, sparkbolts, electrobarriers, machine guns, and astro boulders.

The Genesis version is similar to the SNES rendition, but has more musical tracks and more humor. The SNES game has better graphics overall and richer sound. Both are spruced up ports of the NES version, with a few tweaks here and there in terms of level design. The Game Boy version is for one player only.

Notable Quotable:

"The animation is smooth. The characters are highly detailed . . . the levels are far more interesting than what we saw in *Super Double Dragon* . . . The rock and roll soundtrack fits in quite nicely with a game where you run around beating the crap out of giant rats, ravens, and half-animal mutants . . . The weapon selection is extremely limited . . . The controls are very responsive, but they follow the simplified 'Battletoads' format . . . deserves a solid place in the beat-'em-up genre." –Double Dragon Dojo (doubledragon.kontek.net)

Insider Insight:

What do you get when you stick two of the top beat-'em-up franchises at the time together for no apparent reason? A fairly solid crossover of the two, remarkably enough. Far more *Battletoads* than *Double Dragon* (the game was developed by *Battletoads* developer Rare with little involvement from *Double Dragon* developers Technos), the game's engine and design were lifted directly from the other Battletoads titles—it just also happened to feature *Double Dragon*'s Billy and Jimmy Lee and a selection of their favorite baddies to pummel.

While it didn't really eclipse prior Battletoads titles by any particular measure, it at least offered more of the same for fans, including catchy tunes and the annoyingly frustrating vehicle riding sections. The NES version was a little more remarkable when it hit; the SNES game didn't particularly wow anyone, due to all the other impressive 16-bit titles being released at the time. –Sam Kennedy

Insider Insight:

I loved Mario and quested through the Zeldas, but the Battletoads were on another plane of reality. Zitz, Rash, and Pimple were the 'Toads in question—bizarre, juiced, seemingly-distant relatives of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles with attitudes to match. It got even better when their excellent beat-'em-up games graduated to the franchise mashup, *Battletoads/Double Dragon*. Amazing and incredibly difficult whether on the SNES or the NES, the combination of Jimmy and Billy Lee of *Double Dragon* and the badass Battletoads was everything I loved about video games in the early '90s.

I was blown away by this crossover as a teenager and loved the attitude that Rare brought to the table in designing and programming this game. Unlike certain other fighting platformers, *BT/DD* didn't take itself too seriously—from the nutty character animations to the cool use of 3D, it had a spark of cleverness in what could have ended up a soulless crossover. Of course, the music and polish of the graphics were far better on the SNES version, but on all consoles the game felt and played like a Battletoads game, which really added freshness and energy to the Dragon brothers. But the enjoyment of the game has a masochistic edge because it's incredibly difficult! The game became a kind of acid test for my group of friends, with our endurance proving our gaming mettle before *Battletoads/Double Dragon* melted our brains. –Tim Lapetino

Sonfer Publishing LLC

Battletoads in Battlemaniacs

PUBLISHER: Tradewest.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

In *Battletoads in Battlemaniacs*, protagonists Rash and Pimple punch, kick, run, throw enemies, use weapons, and pull off a variety of wacky fighting moves, including the Battletoad butt, flying battleaxe, big bad boot, ball n' chain, sidearm slice, anvil slice, and/or jawbuster. These fun fighting techniques, which include combos, are used for battling a bevy of creatively designed enemy types, including Karnath (a snake), Rocky (a petrified pig), Fuzz (who has a buzz saw), Scuzz (a rat), Psyko Pigs (which wield battle axes), Porka Pig (who will jump on you), Grogg (a flying demon), Skellington Bone, Lazbot (a mechanical enemy that shoots lasers), and Rat Rocket (an airborne attacker). At certain points, the battling amphibians, who are on a mission to rescue their brother Zits, will ride a speeder bike and a "tracktor."

Along with cartoonish and funny, yet challenging beat-'em-up action, the game has a variety of obstacles to jump over or otherwise avoid, including gaps, spikes, ball blades, lava, pointy logs, a burning bridge, and nests full of "wasplings." There's platforming as well, some of which scrolls vertically, and sometimes you'll ride a floating disc. Levels, which are richly detailed, include: Khaos Mountains, Forest, Speeder Bikes, Karnath's Revenge, and Tracktors. Bonus levels have you riding a checker over a checkerboard, avoiding and grabbing items. In the raucous two-player mode, you can select whether or not you want to be able to hit the other player. The sequel to *Battletoads* for the NES, *Battletoads in Battlemaniacs* ups the ante with larger characters, fairer (though still difficult) gameplay, and, as expected, superior graphics and sounds. The Sega Master System version was only released in Brazil.

Notable Quotable:

"Gameplay is the signature of the Battletoads series, and it really shines in this game. Each stage is a remake or variation in some way, shape, or form of the previous game. The first level is a brawler while level two is a giant hollow tree loaded with traps and spikes instead of a tunnel . . . The speeder bikes return in level three, and they are just as intense as the last game . . . Sound and music are nothing less than awesome as each tune fits the stage perfectly [and] kicks your adrenaline into high gear for the pace of the stage. The sounds are all great: every 'smack,' 'fwack,' and 'biff' fit each move . . . Graphics are sweet . . . the level animations and details are superbly drawn…Hands down the best visuals are the two bonus stages, which have checkerboard flooring, playing cards, and bowling pins . . . They reflect off of the floor and are visually amazing." –Doug Jackson (www.digitpress.com)

Insider Insight:

Every September I'm reminded of the one game I could never finish: *Battletoads in Battlemaniacs*. On my birthday each year, my parents would take me to the store to pick out a game. In 1993, they told me they would buy *Battletoads in Battlemaniacs* once it was in stock, but in the mean time we could rent a game from Blockbuster.

Knowing that I would be having a couple of friends over for my birthday, I decided to go ahead and rent *Battletoads in Battlemaniacs*. I loved the original *Battletoads* on the NES, but I remembered how hard it was and not getting through the Turbo Tunnel [called Speeder Bikes in *Battletoads in Battlemaniacs*], like most of my friends . . . and apparently the entire country! Regardless, I knew my friends and I could all play it together. We had a blast, but we ran into the same hiccup as the original game—WE COULDN'T GET PAST THE TURBO TUNNEL. I remember hoping that the programmers would have changed up that level and we wouldn't have to deal with it (because the first two levels were different), but unfortunately that wasn't the case.

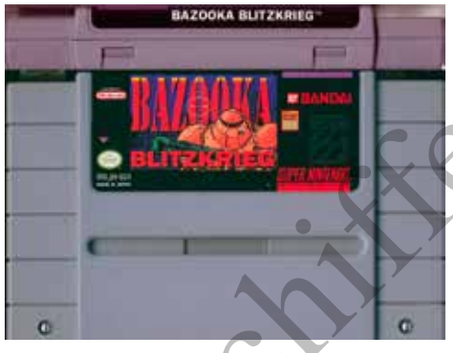
To this day I still can't beat that dreaded Turbo Tunnel, but I'll never forget that birthday with my friends, spending all day trying to beat that stage. –Raymond Fix

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Bazooka Blitzkrieg

PUBLISHER: Bandai.
DEVELOPER: Tose.
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter, 1–4 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1992.

Sylon Inc.'s mainframe has malfunctioned, resulting in a city overrun by XT7 Cyborg-Commando Fighting Machines. Armed with the Super Scope light rifle, you must battle your way through the barrage of baddies to Sylon's computer complex, where you'll destroy the chaos-causing contraption. The action slowly auto-scrolls to the right while you guide a gun sight around the screen, shooting cyborgs that run, pop up, or jump into view. You'll also fire away at helicopters, motorcycles, and mechanized bosses. In addition, there are items to shoot for health and power-ups. The shooting action is routine (despite fast firing and charged shots), and the graphics, which include buildings and industrial areas, are generic and washed-out looking. Known as *Destructive* in Japan.

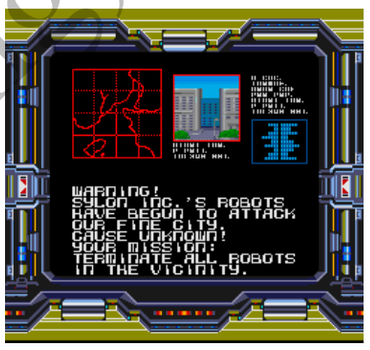


Notable Quotable:

"*Bazooka Blitzkrieg* is boring, and I couldn't even bother finishing it because once you experience the first level you've seen them all." –Retro Gaming Mag (retrogaming-magazine.com)

Notable Quotable:

"There's almost nothing this game does better than *Battle Clash* or *X-Zone*. And I'm saying 'almost nothing' to be generous . . . *Bazooka Blitzkrieg*'s lone deviation from the normal and expected is the multi-player mode. Boot Camp is a mix of a training and a score attack mode where up to four people pass around the Super Scope and attempt to earn the highest score in the levels from the main campaign. It's not bad, and the hot-seat gameplay is the only way to do a multi-player Super Scope game, but it would have been nice to have the levels changed from the single-player." –Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)



Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Beauty and the Beast, Disney's

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft.
DEVELOPER: Probe Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Play a "tale as old as time" with *Beauty and the Beast* for your SNES. Inspired by the 1991 film, which was the first animated movie to be nominated for an Oscar for best picture, the game casts you in the role of a prince transformed into a hideous beast by the magic of an enchantress. You must find true love and earn that person's love in return before your twenty-first birthday, or you'll remain a beast forever. That person is Belle, of course, the girl you have trapped in your castle. What this amounts to is a below average platformer and one of many forgettable 16-bit media tie-ins.

As the beastly prince, you can walk, jump, duck, look up and down, and climb up and down. To battle the bats, frogs, rats, spiders, wolves, flying books, portrait swordsmen, stone gargoyles, and other enemies you'll encounter, you can slap or stomp them, and you can pick up and throw stones. Super stomps can release hidden items, including rose petals for extra time, hearts for extra lives, and a mirror that lets you see what's up ahead. You can also find color-coded books for invincibility, health, double slapping power, and mid-level save points. Seeing as how you are a beast, you do have the ability to roar, which freezes enemies, making them easier to slap. Sometimes it's necessary to freeze bats so you can use them as stair-steps to higher platforms. Roaring also activates certain level elements, such as moving platforms. One type of book you can find makes your freezing power last longer, and collecting books in order (red, orange, green, blue, purple) in a level gives you bonus points.

The action takes place through four chapters in your castle and in the dark woods. A special bonus level in the courtyard has you trying to catch snowballs thrown by Belle so you can win extra lives. Near the end of the game, Gaston, angered because he was rejected by Belle, will stalk you. The NES version of the game was scheduled for release in North America (a prototype exists), but it never happened.

Notable Quotable:

"This title seems to escape a decent cart translation. This version has bad control, unappealing attacks, and less-than-inspired backgrounds. The animations are well done, with cute characterizations, but it just doesn't come off." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Unfortunately, most of the charm, wit, style, and, well, beauty of the Disney film is missing from this hunt-and-confront game. The dark plot and derivative action have Beast skulking around his creepy castle searching for Belle, all the while battling nasty bats, rats, and spiders, and swatting bad guys with his paw. For a less intense *B&B* experience, try Sunsoft's *Belle's Quest* for Genesis." –Chip Carter (*Entertainment Weekly*, June 17, 1994)

Schiffer Publishing

Beavis and Butt-Head, MTV's

PUBLISHER: Viacom New Media.
DEVELOPER: Realtime Associates.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Beavis and Butt-Head, stars of Mike Judge's animated series that originally ran on MTV from 1993–1997, want to go see GWAR in concert, but they don't have any money. To get in for free, they reason, they need to take pictures of themselves doing cool things. Such is the setup for this action-oriented platformer, which takes place over four channels (levels).

In Highland High School, the boys use paintball guns to shoot skateboarders and bullies, dodge bouncing basketballs (and hit them with a bat), engage in chicken fights, and battle Mr. Buzzcut in the showers. On The Streets of Highland, they avoid and battle such enemies as snapping Rottweilers and egg-bombing birds, jump over shopping carts, and bounce from clothesline to clothesline. Highland Hospital enemies to battle include orderlies, janitors, and a wheelchair-riding Todd. In addition, Butt-Head pushes Beavis in a gurney while dodging buckets, falling lights, and X-ray machines. At the Turbo Mall 2000, our heroes battle cops, animals, and bikers and ride a pogo stick. Plus, Butt-Head pushes a shopping cart while Beavis rides inside, blasting enemies with a squirt gun.

In the chicken fight, gurney, and shopping cart sections, Butt-Head controls the forward movement while Beavis uses the weapon. After finishing a channel and taking a picture of Beavis and Butt-Head doing something cool, you go couch fishing for food by using the control pad to move the hook while dogs try to bite your line. You can also grab health-refilling food within the levels, along with weapons and coins, the latter of which are used for playing arcade games and buying vending machine food.

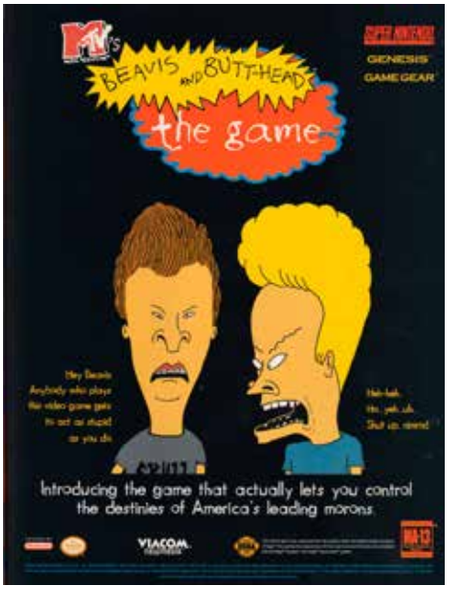
The game is much different than its Genesis counterpart, which has puzzle elements (use the right items in the right areas), bigger characters, and less pixelated graphics. The SNES game has better music and clearer voice effects. The Game Boy and Game Gear carts are different as well.

Notable Quotable:

"This is exactly what you'd expect from an SNES game: scrolling, 2D gameplay with difficult obstacles and low life count. Though it's entertaining, it sports high difficulty in almost every way. You can't jump high, you are constantly clicking 'continue,' and [there are] stubborn bosses that just don't play fair . . . There are some funny details in the game, such as collecting nickels from phone booths and using them in food and soda machines that give health, and you'll have to open your mouth and swallow them before they hit the ground . . . Usually [the enemies will] have some sort of advantage against you, like better speed or invulnerability from your weapons . . . Overall, it's not a bad game, just misguided and more difficult than most games." –GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)

Insider Insight:

I *really* didn't get the TV show of *Beavis and Butt-Head* at ALL until we got the contract to do the game.After watching a few episodes, I finally got the humor.The trick behind doing SNES *Beavis and Butt-Head* was to find activities mischievous enough to be true to their personalities, and at the same time keeping within Nintendo's family-friendly guidelines! We couldn't drop bowling balls off the top of buildings, or have "fire, heh heh heh heh heh," as Nintendo didn't want to endorse these potentially dangerous activities. I think the activities we ended up with were a good compromise. –David Warhol



Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Bebe's Kids

PUBLISHER: Paramount Interactive/ Motown Games.
DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

In 1994, Motown Games was formed as an offshoot of the legendary Motown record label. Unfortunately, the company dissolved after producing two terrible African-American-centric games: *RapJam: Volume One* and *Bebe's Kids*, the latter based on the 1992 animated film of the same name (which in turn was inspired by Robin Harris' "Bebe's Kids" stand-up comedy act).

Bebe's Kids is a beat-'em-up in the tradition of *Final Fight* and *Streets of Rage*, but instead of being one of the best games of the genre, it's among the worst. Players control Kahlil (a boy) or LaShawn (a girl) as they walk, punch, kick, duck, and jump their way through such locations as Fun World amusement park, a haunted house, and a pirate ship. Kahlil can pull off a spin-tuck maneuver while LaShawn does cartwheel attacks. Both can pick up certain projectile items (such as baseballs) to throw at enemies, which include bats (probably the most ubiquitous enemy in all of gaming), robots, security guards, mummies, giant mice, and more.

Bebe's Kids suffers from poor collision detection, choppy animation, clunky controls, sluggish pacing, repetitious hip hop music, and some curious, non-intuitive design choices. In one level, for example, baby Pee Wee crawls around on shelves while you inexplicably try to break the glass dishes that fall from said shelves. Meanwhile, the babysitter tries to catch the glass. Weird. By the way, "Bebe's" is pronounced "Bay-Bays."

Notable Quotable:

"The characters move sluggishly, and it becomes an agonizing chore just getting them across the stage . . . an unplayable mess . . . laggy programming and terrible hit detection . . . the bosses are almost unbeatable . . . the worst conceived gameplay on the system . . . repetitive and terrible music." –SNES HUB (playingwithsuperpower.com)

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Beethoven:
The Ultimate Canine Caper

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Riedel Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platform, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Based on the 1993 movie *Beethoven's 2nd*, which starred Charles Grodin and Bonnie Hunt, *Beethoven: The Ultimate Canine Caper* puts players in the role of the titular St. Bernard, a slow, unwieldy dog who must retrieve his missing puppies from four different parts of town: The Suburbs, The Park, The Kennel, and The Wilderness. Each level is divided into two sections, with players rescuing one of Beethoven and Missy's puppies. In the first section, the objective is to get to the puppy. In the second, Beethoven must carry the puppy back to Missy.

To thwart enemies, such as a poodle, a dogcatcher (who shoots tranquilizer darts), a skateboarder, vultures, squirrels, and Dobermans, Beethoven can bark or shake water at them. To charge the barking weapon, which is a supersonic wave of sorts, you can have Beethoven growl. Items to pick up include bones, drumsticks, and steaks, the last of which grant extra lives. The obstacle-jumping action is repetitious, but younger players may enjoy this semi-cute game to some degree.

Insider Insight:
Beethoven: The Ultimate Canine Caper is one of the worst movie cash-ins I ever had the displeasure of playing. Growing up, I often went to the nearby Albertson's to rent video games, and poor little me made the wrong decision one fateful weekend by renting this stinker. Within minutes of popping it in, I realized I had messed up. Of course, as a kid you would just fake a smile and try to power through the game, thinking eventually it would get fun. I'm sure it doesn't take Sherlock Holmes to figure out that *Beethoven* did not. In fact, it was one of the first times I ever felt like a game was a complete chore, having to carry the puppy through the level, avoiding cheap obstacles while avoiding even cheaper enemy placement, all while suffering through poor platforming mechanics.

Somehow, years later, I ended up playing this game for my YouTube channel, and it brought back horrible memories of having to endure that infamous weekend when I was a kid. The movie is good, though—I highly recommend it. The poor dog that played Beethoven must be rolling over in his grave over his image being used for this game. –Eric Perez

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Best of the Best:
Championship Karate

PUBLISHER: Electro Brain.
DEVELOPER: Loriciel.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

Loosely based on the film *Best of the Best* (1989), *Best of the Best: Championship Karate* is a kickboxing game that lets players train to increase their fighter's strength (blows yield more damage), resistance (tougher to knock down), and reflexes (improves parry). Training consists of sparring, punching a bag, and kicking a pad.

The boxing action features a typical side-view perspective of a non-scrolling ring, with rounds lasting sixty seconds. To land a blow, your fists or feet must hit a non-protective, sensitive part of your opponent: head, torso, or thigh. The health of fighters is denoted by a quartet of spotlights above each side of the ring. When the fighters get too close to one another, they will sometimes clinch, and the referee will break them up. The ref also stops the fight when one of the boxers strikes the same blow three times in succession. Before a regular match and between rounds, a pom-pom girl shows you the round number.

The game offers players a number of options, including fighting as the boxer on the right or left side of the screen, selecting thirteen from a possible fifty-five types of hits you can use, changing the name, look, and nationality of your boxer, and more. Compared to the NES version, the SNES game has crowd noise, a referee, and more detailed graphics. Known as *Super Kick Boxing* in Japan. Also released for the Game Boy and Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"When a game's as tightly focused as this, it's vital that it does what it does extremely well. And, to its credit, *Best of the Best* features some excellent animation and a wide range of different punches and kicks which it takes a while to learn properly. However, there are also a lot of frustrating moments when the two players are standing alongside each other on the screen and can't hit each other. Or when one player is facing in the wrong direction and can't seem to turn around to face his opponent. It also seems that, no matter how hard you try to learn how each move works, and no matter how hard you try to discipline yourself into thinking about what you're doing and which move you ought to be using in a particular situation, matches always tend to degenerate into frantic pressing-all-the-buttons-at-random affairs, with the eventual victor being decided more by luck than anything else." –*Super Play* (March 1993)

Super Play Publishing LTD

Big Sky Trooper

PUBLISHER: JVC Musical Industries.
DEVELOPER: LucasArts.
GAME TYPE: Top-Down Action/Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

An unusual, fairly ambitious game, this cartoonish cartridge puts you in the role of an armored, twenty-one-star general of the Big Sky Troopers, which is basically a boy or a girl (you choose the gender) wearing an odd-looking battle suit. Your mission is to prevent the Sultan of Slime and his army of green, blob-like slugs from conquering the universe. After a mission briefing, you are shown a planetary map where you must select a planet to explore. As you arrive at each planet, you must engage in poor man's *Asteroids*-type shooter action before proceeding to the planet below, where the gameplay switches to top-down action similar to (but not as good as) *Zombies Ate My Neighbors*.

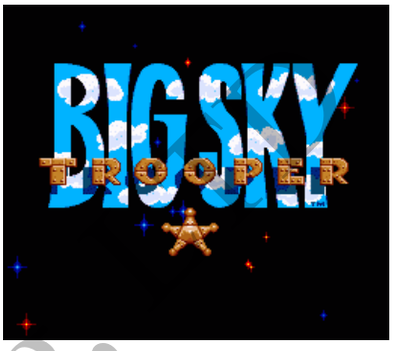
On the various planets, you'll run around using a short-range weapon to zap slugs (which can combine and split) while collecting power-ups, health, and other items, including power packs, ancient artifacts, smart bombs, slug detectors, guiding lights (to see hidden paths), and neon signs (which slugs hate). You'll also perform such tasks as rescuing stranded agents, solving puzzles, repairing machines, using keys to open doors, and acquiring suit upgrades. To complete a planet, you must find and destroy all the slugs. Planets, which have such names as Argon, Barx, Arctos, and Roswell, can feel repetitious, but they do vary in terrain, from ice to grass and trees to cratered dirt to futuristic indoor mazes.

Notable Quotable:

"While some adult gamers may find this a bit too childish for their taste, the gameplay, the sheer size of the game, and the big, complicated mazes make for hours of fun. It's kinda like *Star Control* performed by the Muppets!" –*Game Players* (December 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"Why did LucasArts take such a unique gameplay design and put it in diapers? Kids won't understand the game well enough to beat it, and adults will be turned off by the 'so-cute-you'll-puke' graphics. With a grown-up plot, this game would score a 7 or 8; as it stands, it's a very strange attempt at a 'family' adventure game." –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (November 1995)



Scarfer Publishing

Biker Mice from Mars

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Demolition/Combat Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Similar to the more well-known *Rock N' Roll Racing*, *Biker Mice from Mars* is an entertaining, high speed, pseudo-3D, isometric racer. Instead of a hard rock theme, it is based on the *TMNT*-influenced animated series of the title, which aired from 1993 to 1996. Players select from six different racers—Limburger, Karbunkle, Grease Pit, Modo, Throttle, or Vinnie—each of whom has different vehicle ratings in three categories: speed, acceleration, and grip. Winning races grants money to upgrade engines, tires, armor, and shots. Each racer has two different special attacks, such as Shooting Star, Tornado Whirl, Mutation Beam, Bionic Crash, and/or Grease Gun.

The game offers thirty different tracks, including cities, islands, planetary bases, and more. Game modes include Practice, Main Race, and Battle Race, the last of which has players battling to remain the last mouse (or Plutarkian bad guy) standing while inflicting damage on other racers. Ramp jumps, voice effects, track obstacles (fire, water, trees, rocky roads, and the like), and a complete lack of slowdown add to the fun.

Notable Quotable:

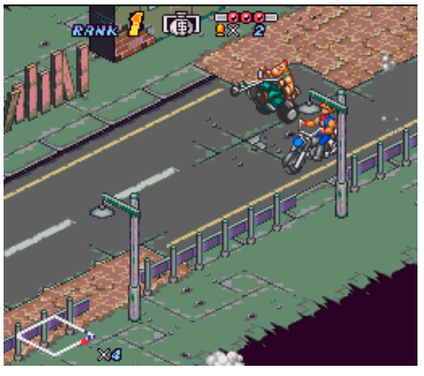
"Completely overshadowed by *Rock N' Roll Racing*, Konami's attempt at a combat racing title is just shy of a classic. *Biker Mice from Mars* doesn't exactly scream quality from the name (the license is fairly weak), and that's the likely reason no one has heard of it. The controls, graphics, and gameplay have an uncanny arcade-style feel for a console game . . . There is no slowdown, and the speed as new engines are purchased is surprising for a console that seems more well-known for its slow processor than color. The voice work and soundtrack add that final layer to this minor classic and complete the illusion that this is a flawless arcade port for those who don't know any better." –Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

Fun Fact:

A number of famous actors lent their voices to various episodes of the *Biker Mice from Mars* cartoon series, including Brad Garrett, Mark Hamill, Michael Dorn, David Warner, and Malcolm McDowell. Several *Beverly Hills, 90210* actors took part as well, including Luke Perry, Jason Priestley, Tori Spelling, and Jennie Garth.

Insider Insight:

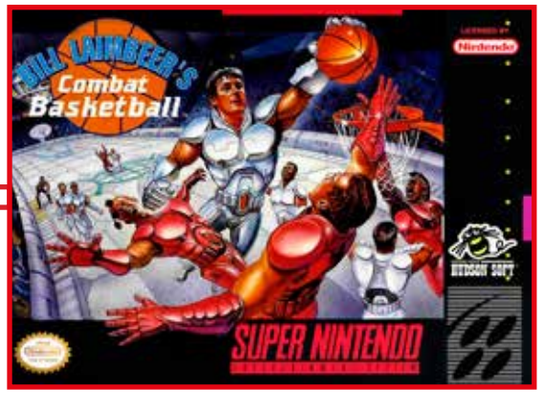
There's nothing like "throttling" around a city-based racetrack as a hardcore alien mouse from Mars. As a kid, I was into all of the anthropomorphic lines—Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Biker Mice From Mars, Battletoads, and the like—so when I found a copy of *Biker Mice from Mars* at the flea market back in the day, I had to have it. The simplicity of the game is what made it so great. While my cousins were into RPG-type games, I was all about the fast-paced games that weren't bogged down with boring storylines. Give me a rocking fast arcade-style game, and I could play for hours. When we'd play, of course I'd have to be the top rebel mouse—my man, Throttle. Battle mode was always the best as it reminded me a lot of *Super Mario Kart*, except with radical mice and much cooler weapons. I spent many hours with the game, beating the pants off my cousins—at least that's how I remember it! –Matt McMullen



Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Bill Laimbeer's Combat Basketball

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft.
DEVELOPER: Hewson Consultants.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball, 1 or 2 Players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.

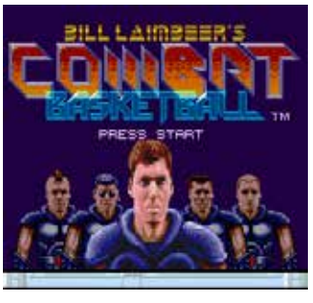


Bill Laimbeer's Combat Basketball was the first (and easily the worst) basketball game for the Super NES. The titular Detroit Pistons bad boy, who helped the team win NBA championships in 1989 and '90, should've been ashamed to attach his name to this vile product. Sporting an overhead viewpoint, *Combat Basketball* has ugly graphics and wretched gameplay. Controls are limited to the directional pad and the B button, the latter of which is used for shooting, jumping, passing, and shoving other players. The action, which takes place in 2023 (when Laimbeer has supposedly become commissioner of the league), is 5-on-5, and the players wear armor.

You can select Single Game or League play. Winning games awards money to purchase players. Game duration choices include three, five, ten, fifteen, twenty, or thirty minutes, and there are four skill levels: beginner, amateur, advanced, and professional. Backcourt violations and out-of-bounds are the only penalties—no goal tending, traveling, or foul calls in this rough-and-tumble game. There are even bombs and saw blades on the court, features that would make the late, great George Carlin proud. However, these noteworthy aspects aren't enough to make the game worth playing.

Fun Fact:
Four-time All-Star Bill Laimbeer, who played fourteen years in the league, was the nineteenth player in NBA history to amass more than 10,000 points and 10,000 rebounds. Before going pro, and before going to the University of Notre Dame, the tenacious rebounder played a Sleestak on the fondly remembered children's TV series, *Land of the Lost*. He was recruited for the show while attending Palos Verdes High School.

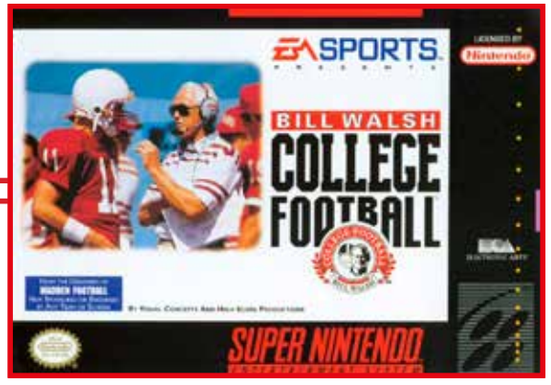
Insider Insight:
I'm going to be honest here—I had no idea who Bill Laimbeer was growing up. Was he even good at basketball? But I did know that he had one of my favorite SNES games that I would play with my cousins. I was first introduced to this game by them when I was staying over for a summer, and I'm proud to say that we spent that entire summer playing against each other. Honestly, I don't know what it was—the game isn't even that great. Perhaps it was the variety of snacks combined with the fun we had talking smack to each other that made the game more enjoyable? Perhaps I'm alone in feeling like this is an underrated multiplayer game? Regardless, I remember really enjoying the chaotic gameplay *Bill Laimbeer's Combat Basketball* provided me and my cousins that summer. –Eric Perez



Scholastic Publishing LTD

Bill Walsh College Football

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: High Score Productions/Visual Concepts.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

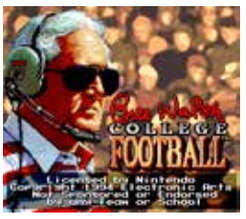


Endorsed by longtime San Francisco 49ers' coach Bill Walsh, who gives scouting reports for each team before a game, this cartridge is similar to *Madden NFL'94*, but with college rules. There are twenty-four contemporary and twenty-four historical teams (each represented by a city or state name), with thirty-five rated players (each represented by a number) per team. The game is multi-tap adapter compatible, meaning up to five gamers can play at once.

Other options and features include: audibles, bluffs, dives, reverse angle replays, on-side kicks, inclement weather, adjustable quarter lengths, hurry-up offense, automatic or manual pass catch mode, and sixty-eight classic college plays, including triple option, student body, and wishbone. Unlike the previously released Genesis version, *Bill Walsh College Football* for the SNES includes an eleven-game season, five-player action, college marching band music after touchdowns, a rotating field (during changes of possession and replays), and a scaling football (during kickoffs and field goal attempts). The Sega CD version adds full-motion video.

Notable Quotable:

"It needs a battery to save statistics and season progress. The computer is not hard to beat, although it is better at playing defense than previous football games. It is also slow to react to your tendencies, so don't be surprised when you march up and down the field using only the Hail Mary play while the computer seems clueless. By the time it reacts, you're already up by two or three touchdowns . . . While *Bill Walsh College Football* may not grab you if you already own and enjoy *Madden NFL '94*, if you're a fan of the triple option, your game has arrived." –All Game Guide (formerly at allgame.com)



Insider Insight:

Some of my fondest memories of *Bill Walsh College Football* come from my grandmother's basement. Nestled in a creaky, old, wheat-colored cushion recliner, I'd sit back every weekend, battling the computer.

However, in the beginning, I had no understanding of how to play the game, or of the plethora of schools featured. I was smart enough to understand the process of setting up the A/V connectors for the Super Nintendo, but I didn't know the actual purpose of a post or slot route. While scrolling through the team select screen my first time to play the game, one school caught my eye. The one and only team I would continue to use every single time I played, the one team that I learned to actually play the game with and eventually dominate my opponents, was the University of Colorado.

The choice was made strictly from presentation. My love of the gold helmet with the black Buffalo was akin to a young child receiving a mixed bag of coins, basing their value off color and shine. Only knowing the I-formation plays and Hail Mary on offense (based on their simplicity), and only picking the nickel-and-dime defensive plays (based on their name), I was a complete disaster playing the game in the beginning.

In short order, though, things began to change, and I would spring out of that dilapidated old chair with excitement, pumping my fist like Michael Jordan, as touchdowns-with-intent replaced scoring on accident. No longer would I jump the line of scrimmage to tackle the quarterback before the hike and receive penalties just for fun. Rather, patience became my ally as I traded that immature act for sacking the computer team's quarterback, resulting in a loss of yards.

I was learning the game of football and life and didn't even know it. At the same time, *Bill Walsh College Football* became the foundation for the years to come of me dominating all my friends and relatives in every EA football game on every subsequent video game console. –Sulaiman Larokko

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

BioMetal

PUBLISHER: Activision.
DEVELOPER: Athena.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

BioMetal, which is similar to such Genesis games as *Gaiares* and *Thunder Force II*, is a fast-paced, fairly typical 16-bit side-scroller with a couple of distinguishing features, most notably a GAM weapon consisting of blue orbs circling the player's ship (which is called a "Halbard fighter"). The GAM acts as a shield and can be charged up and fired at the hordes of flying metal creatures and H.R. Giger-inspired aliens that attack throughout the game's six otherworldly stages, the backgrounds of which include clouds, planets, mountains, cave walls, and the like.

More typical weapons include lasers, missiles, wave shots, and three- and five-way spread fire. One noteworthy thing about *BioMetal* is its soundtrack, which features six tunes by the techno group 2 Unlimited, including the dance hit "Get Ready For This." The songs sound more like something to get the crowd revved up for an NBA basketball game than the music of a shooter, but they do stand out. Boss battles against such behemoths as a tentacled ship and a bio-plant are standard stuff: aim for weak spots on large creatures while dodging appendages and projectiles. The Japanese version of the game features a different soundtrack. A sequel, *BioMetal Gust*, was released for the Sega Saturn in Japan in 1997 (it was included with the *Dezaemon 2* pack).

Notable Quotable:

"The 'GAM' looks like a bunch of blue spheres circling your ship, and when it's activated, it destroys anything it touches. You can expand its radius or even 'throw' it at an enemy, inflicting serious damage. The problem is, once your GAM energy runs out you're toast, so be sure to shut it off whenever you get a breather to let it recharge. *BioMetal*'s graphics did not impress me, but at least there's no noticeable slowdown. Your metallic foes all tend to look the same (including the bosses), and the backgrounds are equally boring. The first stage just features a few layers of storm clouds, and it's just plain ugly. Still, the high challenge of *BioMetal* kept me playing for quite a while, so it's hard to complain too much." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:

Remember in 1993 how 2 Unlimited's hit song, "No Limits," seemed to be everywhere? It was awesome—loud, pumping techno that hiked the adrenaline. It made me a fan of the band, and not just because I had a crush on Anita Doth in her latex outfit. So when reviews for *BioMetal* said the soundtrack was in fact by 2 Unlimited, my interest was immediately hooked. The Japanese soundtrack had actually been really good in its own right, and some might complain about it being removed—but having interviewed the Activision guys behind the changes, I discovered that the original developer Athena had loved the idea of a fresh soundtrack.

As a player, I loved how the final game turned out. Fans of 2D shmups will talk about "being in the zone," that sweet, trance-like moment where the outside world melts away and your only focus is weaving between curtains of bullets while taking down enemies. A techno soundtrack was the perfect addition to *BioMetal*, enhancing the already trance-like nature of its genre. Further, *BioMetal* was one of several early progenitors for the techno-themed *Wipeout*, which was released roughly two years later, and other subsequent games featuring licensed music tracks. This doesn't even touch upon the mechanics of *BioMetal*, which featured a genuinely unique barrier system that constantly recharged. Activating and deactivating it was almost like using a gas pedal on a car, as you rhythmically enabled it only when needed. –John Szczepaniak

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Blackthorne

PUBLISHER: Interplay Productions.
DEVELOPER: Blizzard Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Backed by a detailed storyline (mostly in the manual), smooth animation, and colorful, nicely rendered visuals, *Blackthorne* is a challenging, cinematic shooter with *Prince of Persia*-like exploration, platform-climbing, and puzzles. Players assume the role of Kyle Blackthorne, a brawny warrior outfitted with an upgradeable shotgun and the ability to acquire (from prisoners) hover bombs, fire bombs, steerable bombs, keys (for creating bridges and eliminating force fields), and levitators (for reaching high areas). Pressing up on the control pad "hides" Blackthorne, making for lots of timed, dodge-and-shoot scenarios against the game's many goblins, rock beasts, plant creatures, spider mines (walking explosives), and other enemies, which can hide in the background as well.

Blackthorne can also crouch, climb, do running and standing jumps, and fire backward without looking (an incredibly cool maneuver). He battles his way through seventeen labyrinthine levels (with hidden passageways), including mines, forests, wastelands, and The High Tower of Sarlac. The back of the box boasts "over 1,000 frames of rotoscoped animation." Developed by Blizzard, the company that would go on to create *Diablo* and *Warcraft*, *Blackthorne* is a strong entry in the SNES platform shooter lineup, though the Sega 32X version does have moodier, more realistic graphics and some new levels that take place on a snowy mountain.

Notable Quotable:

"Kyle Blackthorne is a huge badass! He's the epitome of cool in every sense of the word . . . running and jumping is iffy—if you're not absolutely precise, you'll miss . . . standing still and jumping is no problem . . . the combat is as slow as the movement, but I don't mean that in a negative way. Every firefight is a cover-based shootout . . . not exactly adrenaline-pumping action, but it's not easy, either. [The game] is awkward at first and a little unwieldy, but I can't deny that there's just something badass about *Blackthorne*. The game is challenging and unforgiving, but slowly figuring out where and when to use items is part of the fun. The actual combat is rather boring in the grand scheme of things, but it mixes up the pacing and keeps things interesting. Overall, it's a really solid puzzle platformer, and I do recommend you play it." – ProJared (YouTube)

Insider Insight:

When I was a kid, my parents were separated, and I always spent the first Sunday of each month with my mother. We had a routine: since I always took my Super Nintendo with me, after picking me up she'd take me to Blockbuster to rent a game. I'd walk up and down the aisles, looking for something interesting, but renting from Blockbuster had some limitations. You don't rent RPGs or long campaign games with saves because they're usually too long to beat in a day, and someone else is bound to delete your save. I had to be careful with my game selection because it only came around once a month (my father would never allow it). I was always prepared—I'd do my research and check out the latest scoop from *Nintendo Power* or *GamePro*. The hardest part was hoping that most of the cool games weren't already rented out.

One day I stumbled upon *Blackthorne*. I knew nothing about it except what I could decipher from the cover art and the back of the box. Most of my experiences in judging a game by its cover hadn't gone well, but this was a work of art from comic book great Jim Lee of *X-Men* and *WildC.A.T.s* fame, and it didn't let me down. *Blackthorne* had simple platformer mechanics, and it played like *Prince of Persia*, except I had a shotgun for blasting orcs. I could even disappear into the shadows and press up against a wall to avoid enemy fire. I got so into the game that I didn't even realize how much time had passed, and before I knew it, I had beaten the game. I did it in one sitting, in one rental. –Juan Vaca

Scholastic Publishing LTD

BlaZeon:
The Bio-Cyborg Challenge

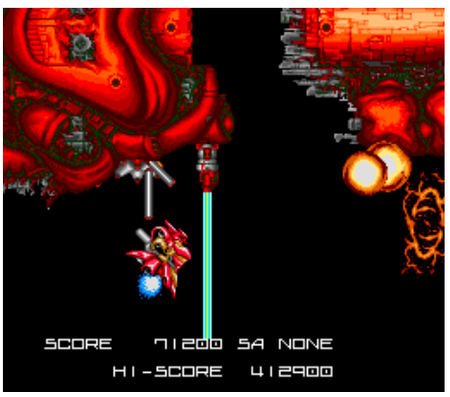
PUBLISHER: Atlus.
DEVELOPER: Al.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

In *BlaZeon*, which is based on the Atlus arcade game from 1992, players pilot the Garland space cruiser through five short but nicely rendered outer space levels, firing bullets and missiles at such enemies as pods, cannons, and mechanical creatures, including huge bosses. There are no traditional weapon power-ups, but players can shoot bio-cyborgs in order to freeze and then take control of them.

There are seven types of bio-cyborgs you can pilot: Mars, armed with a three-way firing mega cannon and three atomic shields; Grain Beat/Odyssey, equipped with funnel guns that can fire in three different forward-firing positions; Shadow Blade, a fast bio-cyborg with a twin cannon weapon and a dimension field that makes the ship invincible for ten seconds; Titan, armed with a slice laser and unlimited homing missiles; Neptune, equipped with a wide lazer and two hyper-bombs; Baron, a winged bio-cyborg equipped with a sonic gun and unlimited diffusing bombs; and Hyper D, a slow bio-cyborg armed with a twin diagonal firing beam gun and unlimited vertical shields (a flare weapon that destroys enemies and their projectiles). In addition to dodging enemies and their firepower, you'll need to avoid such obstacles as rocks, columns, and walls. *Gradius* fans should enjoy *BlaZeon*, despite its lack of a power-up system.

Notable Quotable:

"The Super NES translation . . . is a rather accurate one. The visuals and audio aren't as high-quality as expected but are impressive for the platform. To make up for cartridge limitations, some animations, including the opening and parts of Stage 2, have been cut. Three difficulties (easy, normal, and hard) can be accessed by pressing 'select' on the title screen. Like its arcade counterpart, unlimited continues are offered, but the player is sent back to the beginning of the stage. Stage 4 is almost its own unique stage with a junkyard theme. In lieu of the arcade version's Stage 3 mid-boss, there are two exclusive mid-bosses in Stage 4. The most significant and aggravating change is the lack of two player co-op, making this version a single-player affair. In addition to the substantial changes, there are several minor and even weird changes. Some bosses have different attack patterns, and there are some different enemy placements in parts. For some reason, Stages 3 and 4 have been switched in the Super NES game, and the beginning of Stage 4 is a recoloring of the beginning of the arcade version's third stage. Perhaps the most bizarre, after the final boss is defeated the game just loops with no credits screen shown." –Brett Prichard (www.hardcoregaming101.net)



Schiffer Publishing, LTD

The Blues Brothers

PUBLISHER: Titus Software.
DEVELOPER: Titus Interactive Studio.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

Based on the classic movie (1980) of the title, which grew out of a *Saturday Night Live* skit, this below-average, uneven platformer lets you control deadpan musical performers Jake and Elwood (played by John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd in the film), looking semi-cool in dark suits, dark shades, and black hats. As one or both Blues Brothers, you must journey through the sewers, warehouses, stores, and suburbs of thirty-four big cities (twenty-five in two-player mode), trying to reach your first paying gig. For some strange reason, if either character eats cake, they become shirtless, buff, and shout, "Rock, rock, rock, rock, and roll," a line never said in the film. This transformation doesn't appear to affect gameplay much (if at all).

In the two-player mode, you and a friend must decide which character each of you should control. Jake walks fast but jumps poorly while Elwood can leap high but is slow. The brothers also swim, throw one another, ride elevators, climb stairs, switch electric arcs, and walk on ice. As you make your way through the levels, you must dodge, jump over, or throw records (including extra destructive super records) at enemies having nothing to do with the film, such as dogs, flies, man traps, mosquitoes, lawnmowers, snails, and dodo birds (sorry, no Nazis). At various points, you'll need to use such items as springs and mushrooms that act as trampolines, along with a friendly snake that you can ride and control. To increase the time limit in a level, you can grab an hourglass. Your goal in each level is to reach a large jukebox. Much different than the NES game of the same name.

Fun Fact:
John Belushi was paid $500,000 for his role in *The Blues Brothers*. Dan Aykroyd received half that amount. John Wayne's son, Ethan Wayne, was a stuntman in the movie—no word on how much he was paid. A follow-up to the film, *Blues Brothers 2000*, was released in 1998. It starred Aykroyd and John Goodman (Belushi died in 1982) and spawned a Nintendo 64 game.

Notable Quotable:
"The 1980 cult classic comedy . . . was chock full of video game potential: car chase scenes, seedy Chicago atmospheres, riotous musical numbers; even Carrie Fisher packing a rocket launcher. Spectacular! Somehow this feast of fun, when in the hands of Titus Software, turned into a repetitive platformer with very little action and a regretful absence of Blues. A G-rated *Mario* borrower was nothing fresh to the video game world, and as a result this game has understandably gone largely overlooked." –SNES HUB (playing-withsuperpower.com)

Sniffer Publishing

B.O.B.

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: Gray Matter.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

In *B.O.B.*, the titular robot, who looks like a giant bipedal ant, runs, jumps, ducks, hangs, and climbs his way through more than forty-five colorful, futuristic, labyrinthine levels (cities, tunnels, caves, and the like), firing a laser gun (left, right, and straight up) at an assortment of aliens and robots while trying to find each exit. There are more than forty enemy types in all, including missiles, floating mines, bug pods, ceiling cannons, flying gnats, crash turtles, cloaked sages, horseflies, scorpions, firebirds, skulls, and lava men. B.O.B must battle bosses as well.

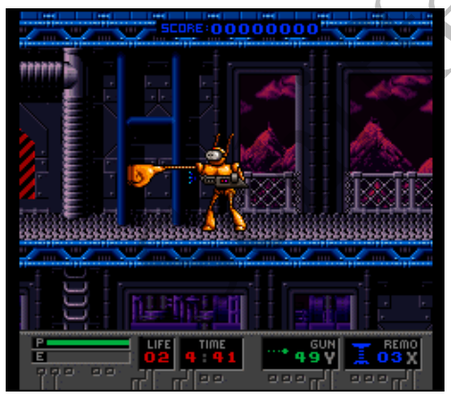
To help complete the mission, B.O.B. can upgrade his weapon to triple-shot, flamethrower, rocket, bolt, wave, and punch (a giant fist). In addition, B.O.B. can grab "remotes" enabling him to freeze enemies, create a force shield, glide (via umbrella), bounce high (via trampoline), fly (via helicopter hat), and dispense floating bombs. The weapons and remotes are selectable through an inventory screen. B.O.B. also rides moving platforms and commandeers a *Jetsons*-like vehicle. Levels are timed, making for a harrowing challenge, but humorous animations and text balloons provide comic relief. Similar to the Genesis version, but with better animation and music, more colors, and superior background detail.

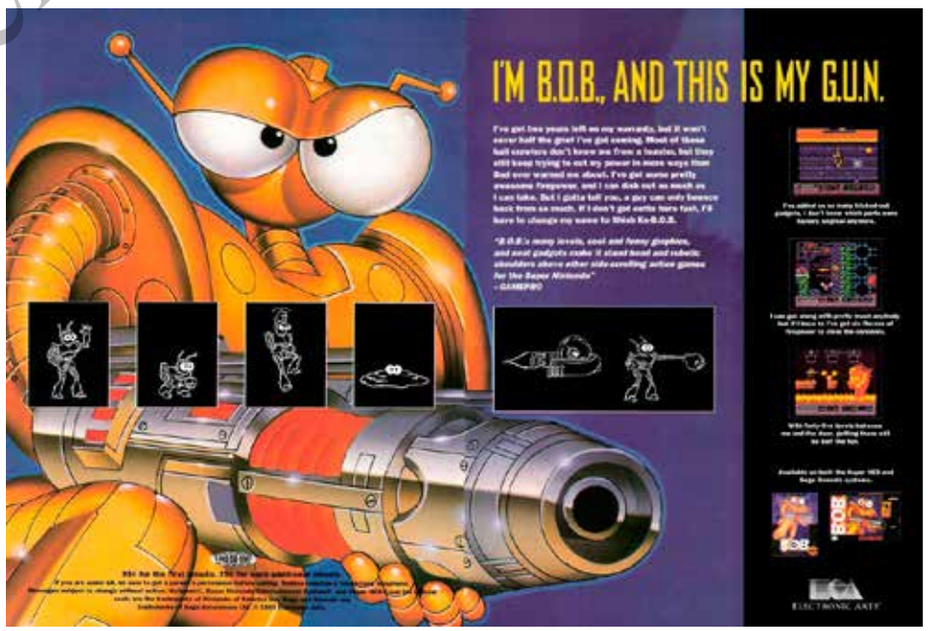
Notable Quotable:

"*B.O.B.* is a fun, yet frustrating game. It is full of blind drops and frustrating fall damage, two things that can lead to untimely deaths. But even with the challenge, you may just find yourself enjoying this great little find from the Super Nintendo era." –Josh Despain (www.defunctgames.com)

Notable Quotable:

"At first, I really liked this game. It has excellent animation, cool sight gags, and plays extremely well. The only problem is the repetition; each level is too similar to the last. In fact, it almost turns into a maze game. More diversity would have made *B.O.B.* a hit." –*GameFan Magazine* (April 1993)





Retro Publishing LLC

Bonkers

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

A cute, colorful platformer based on the Disney cartoon series (1993–1994), *Bonkers* puts you in control of Bonkers D. Bobcat, a cop who must recover three priceless treasures: The Sorcerer's Hat, The Mermaid's Voice, and The Magic Lamp. You will run, jump, crouch, and dash through six worlds, including a mansion, Wacky Studios, a neighborhood, a cruise ship, underground, and Toon World. Each world is populated by such enemies and obstacles as bulldogs, frogs, possums, bats, outlaws, UFOs, kangaroos, weasels, seagulls, penguins, alligators, moving platforms, cacti, sea monkeys, spore plants, baseball-throwing apes, spike insects, and/or sewer crocs. You can jump on the enemies (to kill them and propel Bonkers to higher areas), do a rolling attack (which has a meter), and throw bombs.

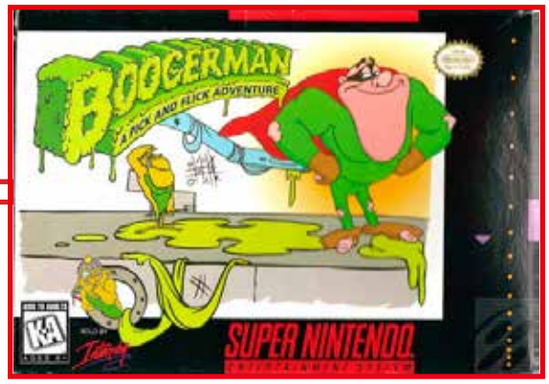
In addition to getting boxes that refill your bomb supply, you can grab extra lives, badges (ten adds one bomb to your maximum amount), hyper juice (turns you red and has you dashing for a brief time), donuts (refills one life heart), cake (restores all hearts), and heart containers (adds one heart to maximum). Some of the bosses you'll battle include Vacuum, which runs across the screen chasing you, Rat-Bat, who flies from chimney to chimney while his partner Toon Helicopter drops bombs, and Louse, who spits garbage and breathes tornados. Busting open balloons (by bombing or dashing into them) releases an item or, sometimes, an enemy called Beezle. Balloons can also be used as platformers to reach higher areas. Much different than the Genesis game of the same name, which is a multi-genre action title under the Sega Club banner.

Notable Quotable:

"It's a good game, but it's got nothing on games like *DuckTales* or *Aladdin* . . . plays out like a standard platformer—just go from left to right while jumping on or bombing enemies. Seriously, that's all you need to know. There is nothing that makes this special or anything you'd want to purchase over *Super Mario World* or *Super Metroid*, other than the fact that it's *bleep*ing *Bonkers* or the fact that it was made by Capcom and you want to complete your collection of Capcom games . . . Most Capcom/Disney games have pretty good soundtracks, and *Bonkers* comes close. Each track is reasonably upbeat and is orchestrated in a way that'll make you feel like you're in the show yourself." –Neoseeker (www.neoseeker.com)

Archer Publishing

Boogerman: A Pick and Flick Adventure



To enter the first level, Snotty Ragsdale, aka super-hero Boogerman, gets flushed down a toilet, setting the perfect stage for this gross but cartoonish and fun game. Players guide a running, jumping, ducking, swinging, flying, balding, disgustingly rotund Boogerman through six multi-stage worlds—Flatulent Swamps, The Pits, Boogerville, Mucous Mountains, Nasal Caverns, and Pus Palace—burping, flicking snot, hocking loogies, and farting to battle Booger Meister and his "stenchmen," including nose slugs, fart ghosts, and toilet goblins.

Aside from the potty-brained theme (with its many shades of greens and browns), *Boogerman* offers fairly standard platforming action, but excellent controls, solid level design (which includes hidden items and multiple pathways), and beautifully disgusting, thirty-frames-per-second animation (created from more than 1,800 hand-drawn animated cells) make it a standout title. A proposed sequel to this 24-meg cult classic never saw the light of day. The Genesis version has more voice samples, a more robust musical score, and slightly better graphics.

Fun Fact:
On October 16, 2013, *Boogerman* creators Mike Stragey and Chris Tremmel announced a Kickstarter campaign for *Boogerman 20th Anniversary*, a new game similar to the original but with "a new game structure, new mechanics, new levels, and new gorgeous HD animation, art, and presentation." Unfortunately, they only reached $40,252 of their $375,000 goal, and the project was cancelled.

Notable Quotable:
"An absolutely fun and insane title that will keep you laughing with giddy pleasure until the very end . . . fun and inventive characters and scenery, all created around the idea of mostly snot. That's right, a world of boogers, snot, farts, and burps. How does this get any better? The art style reminds me of *Ren & Stimpy*, and the controls are fantastic to go along with it. Hold the fart button longer to make Boogerman strain with a giant plume of toxic flatulence. Turn your enemies into liquid waste with a burp from the lower bowels, and we mustn't forget the simple task of digging deep into Boogerman's nose to flick the largest snotty mess you can find. The bosses are actually challenging, and as easy as it would've been to lower the quality of the game due to the stupidity of its nature, that's not what this game is about. It's actually quite challenging, impressive, and enjoyable." –Play Legit (playlegit.net)

Insider Insight:
At one point or another, most every child heard the words "you're too young" or "when you're older" from an adult when wanting to do something maybe they were a little too young for. I remember a few shows on MTV in the '90s I was forbidden to watch, as well as missing out on a few movies that had an R rating. You could imagine my surprise when on my tenth birthday I unwrapped my own copy of *Boogerman: A Pick and Flick Adventure*.

The game must have sold itself to my dad. After all, the back of the box has so many corny jokes and puns, a dad probably wrote it. Despite the game's intriguing grossness, I wasn't expecting much from the gameplay, but I found myself pleasantly surprised when it turned out to be a solid 2D platformer. At times jumping from platform to platform can be annoying as you climb vertically through the level—you can easily fall all the way down to the beginning—but it's still a lot of fun.

Boogerman may not be the most appropriate game for younger children, as I remember getting some odd looks from relatives at parties while playing and was even forced to turn it off one time when some younger cousins were around. But the game will pull you in, from the music to the gameplay. It is definitely worth your time and will not disappoint. –Anthony J. La Gambina

Scarfer Publishing, LLC

PUBLISHER: Interplay Productions.
DEVELOPER: Interplay Productions.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

Insider Insight:
There was a time in the '90s when game designers would do just about anything to get their title noticed. In a market teeming with competitors, the way to the consumer heart was easily paved by popping out some big boobs, scary monsters, and explosions on the cover, anything that triggered an immediate attraction; i.e. "sex and violence." It was an old strategy, one that had been used since the very beginning, but by 1994, some cool game designers had begun to take the road less traveled, so to speak, and followed it right off the edge of the world into the downright bizarre. Thank heavens, yes. But whatever you do, don't light a match.

Boogerman: A Pick and Flick Adventure was the game that delighted some and revolted others. Set in a green, mucus-laden world of slimy forests and purulent sewers, our obese, bean-eating, toilet-teleporting hero searches through piles of excrement for prizes while farting, flicking boogers, and hawking loogies at enemies who look like trolls. It's great. No, seriously. This game is fabulous.

Even though I'd be the first to admit that the humor in *Boogerman* is one-hundred-percent juvenile and akin to the guy you know who still armpit farts for laughs at parties and tries the old "pull my finger" trick on girls, this game is challenging and enjoyable to an extreme. The first time I met the first boss, an idiotic-looking superhero redneck named Hickboy who's carrying a chicken, I hyperventilated by laughing so hard that it took me four tries to kill him. That's the kind of reaction that oftentimes endears you to a game quickly regardless of its content; when you fail not because the game is too difficult but because you have tears in your eyes from cracking up too hard. I wish the world had more games like *Boogerman*. –Catherine DeSpira

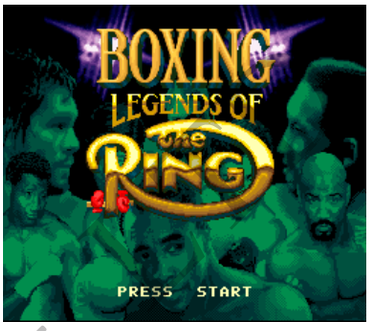
Critical Publishing LTD

Boxing Legends of the Ring

PUBLISHER: Electro Brain.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Boxing, 1–8 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

Viewed from an over-the-shoulder perspective, *Boxing Legends of the Ring* lets gamers play as eight different middleweight greats: Roberto Duran, Tommy Hearns, Jake La Motta, Rocky Graziano, Sugar Ray Robinson, Sugar Ray Leonard, Marvin Hagler, and James Toney, each of whom is rated according to punch power, stamina, and chin. Players, fighting in the Las Vegas Hilton casino, can earn strength points to boost each category or even create their own boxer via Career mode. In Battle of the Legends mode, up to eight players can join in on the fun. Super punches are acquired after each round or knockdown. Standard moves include jabs, uppercuts, hooks, blocks, dodges, crosses, and clinches (to regain stamina). You can even duck.

The SNES version has slightly better audio/visuals than its Genesis counterpart, but both are great fun. The Japanese rendition, known as *The Ring: Final Knockout*, takes place in a generic boxing ring and replaces the HBO banner ads with the publisher's name. A version called *Chavez II* was released in Mexico and the American Southwest, exchanging the English words for Spanish.



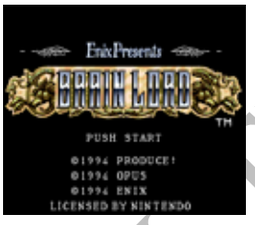
Notable Quotable:

"For a 2D boxer, it holds up pretty well . . . even with rather simplistic graphics and play control, you can still get emotionally invested in a tough fight as you swap punches with the computer. It may not be *Fight Night*, but the developers really tried to make a serious boxing game with a big-fight feel, and there's something to be said for how well they did." –Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Schiffer Publishing

Brain Lord

PUBLISHER: Enix.
DEVELOPER: Produce.
GAME TYPE: Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.



In the oddly titled *Brain Lord*, you control an adventurer named Remeer, the son of the last of the Dragon Warriors (geek reference—*Brain Lord* publisher Enix developed *Dragon Warrior* for the NES). As Remeer, you'll journey through two towns—Arcs and Toronto, the latter of which contains a battle arena where you fight for money—and five huge dungeons: The Tower of Light, Ancient Ruins, Ice Castle, Droog Volcano, and Platinum Shrine. The exploring, sword-swinging action evokes a poor man's *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, and you can also purchase (and later resell) such weapons as bows, boomerangs, axes, maces, and flails. In addition, you can acquire shields and armor and up to thirteen magic spells, along with X-ray glasses, food, warp gates, herbs, and keys (for opening doors).

Remeer, who, unlike many RPG protagonists, can jump, is the only character you control, but up to two sprites at a time can follow him during his journey. These fairy-like creatures perform a variety of helpful tasks, such as throw fireballs, release lightning bolts, and restore your hit points. Much of the puzzle-solving in this puzzle-heavy dungeon explorer involves pushing rocks. If you need to save your progress or refill your life meter, you can stay at an Inn. If you need information, try talking to a statue. Statues can also save your progress.

Notable Quotable:

"Another action/RPG title from Enix. This one is more standard fare with atmospheric music, huge levels, and average graphics. This one strikes a nice balance between the action and RPG elements and will probably have a wider appeal. The story is a bit plodding at times, but veteran RPG players will catch on quickly and get hooked." *–Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"A fun and challenging game, it was sadly overshadowed by other high-profile RPGs in Japan, and ignored in the U.S. as well despite generally positive reviews. While it holds up as a lighthearted, challenging adventure that any fan of *Ys* and *The Legend of Zelda* will feel right at home with, it also has enough unique ideas to stand on its own merits as a great game . . . very colorful, with lots of different environments to travel through. The actual characters and animation aren't particularly impressive, but the large variety of enemies seen throughout the game makes up for the lack of animation. It sounds great, too, with a nice set of catchy tracks.

"The music and sound effects were created by a group named Opus. Opus is actually just a small company, yet they have a very eclectic resume. Besides other Produce RPGs, they have done both music and sound design work on games like *Cybernator* and *Thundercade* . . . The man in charge of the game's graphics, Jun Kusaka, is also responsible for the look of several Hudson games like *Super Adventure Island* and *Super Bomberman 2*. Today he works as an animator for Square Enix, and is responsible for the combat and action animations in several games for them ranging from *The Bouncer* to *Final Fantasy XIII*. *Brain Lord* was directed by Shinji Imada, and while he only directed a small number of games, it's impressive how each one (especially in the cases of *Brain Lord*, *The 7th Saga*, and *Mystic Ark*) have completely different structures as well as unique visual styles, despite being made one after the other by the same people." –Chris Rasa (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Super Fighter Publishing, LLC

Insider Insight:
In the debate between friends and colleagues over my lack of love for the SNES' rival, the Sega Genesis, I often point to my enduring love of the variety of RPGs on the SNES versus the competitor, and not just the ones that were heavily marketed. At the top of the list are *7th Saga* and *Brain Lord*, both by Enix, which was a rival of SquareSoft at the time.

I felt as if my young senses simply couldn't keep up with *Final Fantasy III* and *Secret of Mana*. I needed a simple RPG with a pace I could grasp, and *Brain Lord* was that game. Sure, it was awkward talking to friends who had never heard of the game, but I didn't care. *Brain Lord* was the band with the great lyrics, killer guitar licks, and awesome drum solos that my dumb gamer friends just weren't sophisticated enough to understand. You could keep your mainstream RPGs, but I knew I was a part of something different, something special

Brain Lord has a visual style that fits its unique gameplay, which focuses more on puzzle solving and less on RPG traditions to that point. Yes, this is an action RPG, but with elements that take it far from the *Secret of Mana* neighborhood and into its own cul-de-sac of gaming goodness. It may not be as flashy as its constituents, but with a great soundtrack and a rock-solid concept, it doesn't need to be.

Brain Lord, both now and when it came out, is a game I am proud to stand by and talk up even when people still look at me in bewilderment. Before *EarthBound*, *Brain Lord* was my hipster gaming reference before both the words 'hipster' and '*EarthBound*' sold out to the mainstream. Thrusting me into a new world and concept, *Brain Lord* taught me the ropes of what a good, highly unusual RPG can be. –Nick DeMarco

Scientific Publishing, LTD

The Brainies

PUBLISHER: Titus Software.
DEVELOPER: Titus Interactive Studio.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Although simplistic in terms of audio and video, *The Brainies* fits much of the criteria for a good puzzler: it's easy to learn yet hard to master; it's as addictive as nicotine; and it has responsive, simple controls. Using a cursor, players guide red, yellow, blue, and green Brainies around a series of small, maze-like playfields (squares and rectangles with a few pathways), nullifying the M&M-like creatures' existence by placing them on sleeping pads of their own color. When every Brainie is on a sleeping pad of its color, it's on to the next screen. As players strain their brains through one hunred timed levels, bombs, bumpers, and other obstacles will make things difficult. In addition, Brainies themselves get in each other's way. For extra time, you can grab hearts. Released in Europe as *Tiny Skweeks*.

Notable Quotable:

"*The Brainies* are a nice gang to hang with for a while. Novices won't stay long, but serious puzzle fiends may find themselves staying up late to reach those ninetieth levels." –*GamePro* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"Complex puzzles within games can be both infuriating and rewarding. *The Brainies* seems to borderline on the verge of 'insanity' with its climaxing stages. More obstacles are thrown your way in the form of bombs, strange road signs, and even a teleportation device. These all make for fun additions, but frantically push the player into a stream of rage and disbelief, only to conclude with the control pad at the other end of the room with the select button missing. The save 'password' option is available, but would you actually come back to this? Unless you are a puzzler fan with a great attention span, it's hard to see this being a plausible option when there're so many other puzzle games available . . . *The Brainies* doesn't account for the hardware it's being played on and fails to make full potential of the color palette and any use of the sound chip. The soundtrack is quite abysmal in some aspects. While the music is good, it's tedious and repetitive." –Danny Major (retroasylum.com)

Scrier Publishing

Bram Stoker's Dracula

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Psygnosis/Traveller's Tales.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

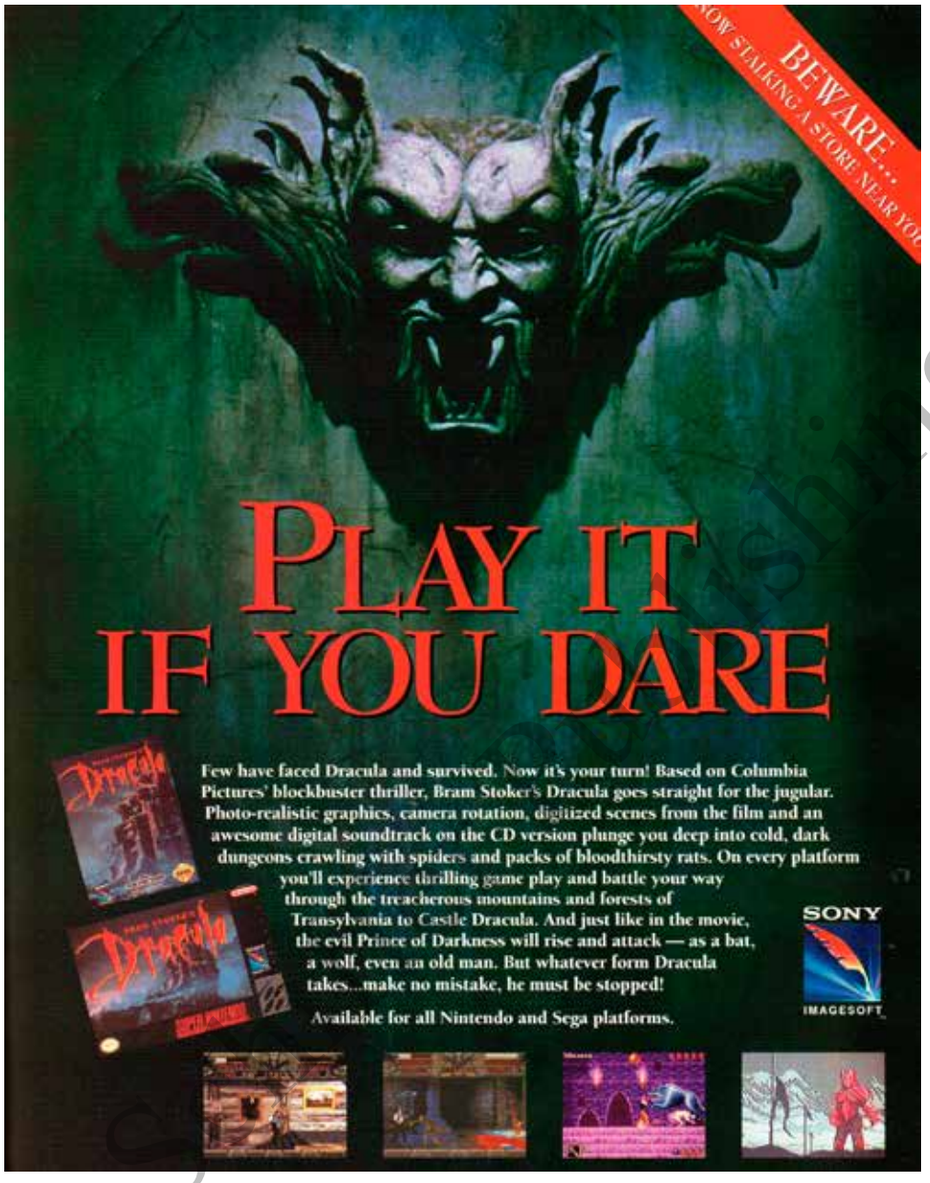
On a quest to rescue Mina from a fate worse than death (eternal life as a vampiress), Jonathan Harker must walk, jump (including long jumps), crouch, hack, and slash his way through Transylvania woods, Castle Dracula, The Hillingham State Mansion, The Carfax Abbey Crypt, and other creepy locales, each divided into day and nighttime scenes. Harker, who can do a jumping smash to fall through ledges, will face various forms of Prince of Darkness, along with a plethora of enemies and obstacles, including bats, rats, spiders, nail beds, evil henchmen, Dracula's dragon, Dracula's brides, knives, and falling rocks.

Weapons Harker can pick up and use against his enemies include rocks, triple rocks, an axe (which spins when thrown), a sword, and a torch. You can burn enemies up close with the torch, or drop it, making it burst into flames and killing all enemies within range. Based on the 1992 feature film, which was directed by Francis Ford Coppola, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* also appeared (in varying forms) for the Game Boy, Game Gear, Genesis, NES, and Sega CD. The Master System cartridge was only released overseas.

Fun Fact:
Irish author Bram Stoker unleashed his novel *Dracula* on an unsuspecting world in 1897. The book has never been out of print and has inspired more film and stage adaptations than any other novel. Drawing inspiration from the centuries-old vampire myth, and from ruthless fifteenth century Wallachian Prince Vlad III the Impaler, *Dracula* tells of a Transylvanian count who travels to London, pierces the necks of his victims with his fangs to drink their blood, and is pursued by a group of Victorians, including his real estate agent, Jonathan Harker. A fearsome, preternaturally strong creature, Dracula mesmerizes his victims with hypnosis and can morph into a bat, a dog, a wolf, and fog. My favorite film adaptation of the book is *Horror of Dracula* (1958) starring Christopher Lee as the count. One of the coolest video games inspired by the legend is *Dracula* for the Intellivision. One of the lamest is *Bram Stoker's Dracula* for the SNES.

Notable Quotable:
"The Genesis version of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* was a 'serviceable platformer' while this SNES edition is an utter abomination . . . Unlike the Genesis version, you begin with a dagger instead of a sword, and it has a range of about half an inch . . . you'll suffer plenty of damage before you even locate the sword . . . the number of cheap hits is outrageous . . . the stunning visuals of the movie have been replaced by lackluster stages rendered in muted brown tones . . . this game is so sloppy . . . doesn't even feel like a finished product." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Jeffer Publishing, LLC



Insider Insight:
When *Bram Stoker's Dracula* was released for the 16-bit generation, there was a lot of debate within my family on which would be the best version. The Super Nintendo and Sega Genesis games were similar. The Sega CD game, however, was completely different. Thinking that the CD version would be superior, my choice was clear. My brother, however, was convinced that the Super Nintendo version was the way to go. The weeks leading up to the release had us checking the newest issues of game magazines looking for descriptions and images of the games in hopes we could compare them. I was drawn to the dark images and CG graphics while my brother favored the more traditional features. We were only able to purchase one game so we ultimately went with the Sega CD game. We then rented the Super Nintendo game a few weeks later to compare the titles.

While I still stand by the Sega CD version as a decent game, I do have to admit the Super Nintendo cartridge was better in almost every respect, even if you met your untimely death too quickly. As frustrating as it was, it still felt like a better-made game. The enemies were well-designed and not as repetitive as their CD counterparts. The fact that they actually gave you weapons in the Super Nintendo version made it far more playable than the Sega CD game. I learned a hard lesson with this experience: new technology does not always make it better. Chalk one up for my brother who reminded me of this for years after. –Zoe K. Howard

Brandish

PUBLISHER: Koei Corporation.
DEVELOPER: Koei Corporation.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action RPG, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

In *Brandish*, a role-playing game similar to *Breath of Fire* and *Brain Lord*, you are Varik, a mighty swordsman falsely accused of murder. While being pursued by a vengeful sorceress, you fall into an underground world of scary monsters, mind-boggling mazes, and treacherous traps. Your job is to escape from this dark underworld and return to civilization. In trying to escape from the labyrinthine depths of this hellish place, you must use your swords and shields to ward off more than fifty types of creatures intent on your death, including gargoyles, skeletons, Minotaurs, ninjas, and wizards. You can also equip armor and chain mail.

During your journey, you can find, purchase, and sell more than fifty different helpful items, including invisibility potion, fire magic (shoots fireballs), steel balls (you drop them to check for holes in the ground), and master keys (for opening doors and treasure chests). A map is available for your perusal to help navigate the five levels of play: Ruins Area, Tower, Cave, Dark Zone, and Fortress. At various points throughout the game, you can try to get helpful information by communicating with other characters.

So you won't have to repeat earlier levels every time you turn on your Super Nintendo, you can save up to two games at any one time. This solidly playable dungeon crawler was followed by several Japanese sequels, including *Brandish 2: The Planet Buster* for the Super Famicom and *Brandish: The Dark Revenant* for the PSP.

Notable Quotable:

"*Brandish*'s play mechanics are simple enough for a beginning RPGer to pick up, but veterans will have a great time puzzling out its mysteries." –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (May 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"Most non-Japanese gamers are probably the most familiar with the SNES version, which was ported and localized by Koei. Unfortunately, the game speed feels completely off—it's either too fast or too slow, depending on your settings—and inventory management is a complete and total nightmare, especially when trying to change equipment in real time. The PC versions take place in a window, and in the SNES version, the view has been expanded to take up the whole screen. While less cramped, not having an automap in the corner is completely maddening since you'll be flipping back and forth between the dungeon view and full map almost nonstop. The graphics are similar but drawn at a lower resolution. Koei added a 'talk' option that lets you gab with the shopkeepers a bit. Naturally, Dela's outfit had been changed to be less revealing, in keeping with Nintendo of America's standards at the time." –Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Griffer Publishing LLC

Brawl Brothers

PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: Jaleco.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

The follow-up to *Rival Turf!*, *Brawl Brothers* isn't as good as *Final Fight* or *Streets of Rage*, but it is an upgrade over *Rival Turf!*, offering better animation and more playable characters. Joining Jack Flak (renamed Hack) and "Oozie" Nelson (renamed Slash) are judo master Lord J. (palm strike, running clothesline, shin kick), ninja Kazan (backhand strike, sliding kick, collar throw), and professional wrestler Wendy (various dropkicks, piledriver, jumping spin kick). Each brawler has a variety of moves and can pick up energy-replenishing food (which is throwable) and the following weapons: sledge hammer, steel pipe, spiked bat, shotgun, knife, rock, dumbbell, and bomb.

Areas to battle through include the streets of Bayside City, the Bayside Bridge, the jungle, rooftops, Dieter's Command Center, and on and inside a flying battleship. You begin the game by selecting a main character and a backup. Clones of the other characters are bosses, and by defeating a clone, the real character will be set free and become playable in the next level. In Angry Mode, which is a holdover from *Rival Turf!*, getting hit several times makes your character more powerful and resistant to attack. Player Versus Player also returns. Released in Japan in 1993 as *Rushing Beat Ran: Fukusei Toshi*. Followed by *The Peace Keepers* (SNES).

Notable Quotable:

"While *Brawl Brothers* is an obvious *Final Fight* knockoff, it's a good one. If it had a greater variety of enemies, it might well have taken out the current 16-bit beat-'em-up champ, *Streets of Rage 2*. Video vigilantes who've polished off other games should bring *Brawl Brothers* into their family." –*GamePro* (July 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"Two can play at once, which can be fun. The graphics are colorful and nicely designed, with some nifty backgrounds. There are attempts to break up the gameplay a bit—notably things like mines on the ground, holes in the floor, and a gun you can pick up. In fact, as beat-'em-ups go this is a pretty good one." –*Super Play* (March 1993)

Insider Insight:
I founded a group called B.E.T.A. Club while working on my animation degree during graduate school in Savannah, Georgia. The letters stood for Beta Eprom Testing Association, and we'd reach out to many video game publishers in the hopes of scoring an advance copy for the club to play in exchange for our feedback. Most publishers scoffed at us, but a few expressed interest and gave us a shot. Jaleco was one of the software houses that participated, God bless them, and that was how the group was first exposed to the wonder that is *Brawl Brothers*.

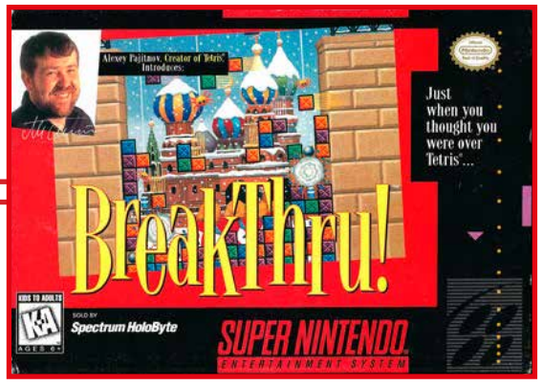
Everyone in the club enjoyed a good scrolling beat-'em-up, and we had been growing bored with *Final Fight*, despite it being such a great port on the SNES. *Brawl Brothers*' predecessor, *Rival Turf!*, was not a club favorite, although it did get a lot of play as it offered a two-player co-op mode that was omitted from *Final Fight*. So, when *Brawl Brothers* arrived in the club mailbox, we were delightfully surprised to discover that it was also fun!

The U.S. version of the game had been regionalized, but the original import version could be unlocked with a cheat code that allowed access to a few cosmetic changes. One hilarious extra move allowed the character Douglass Bild to kick an opponent in the crotch, providing much comic relief to club members. If you want to mimic such hijinks, simply press B,A,X,Y over and over again during the Jaleco logo screen. When the screen glitches, press down three times and then press start. Now you too can enjoy watching your enemies writhe in pain. – Michael Thomasson

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

BreakThru!

PUBLISHER: Spectrum HoloByte.
DEVELOPER: Artech Studios.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



Endorsed (but not designed) by *Tetris* mastermind Alexey Pajitnov, *BreakThru!* has players trying to clear a wall comprised of small blocks before time runs out. To eliminate blocks, players must click on groups of two or more blocks of the same color. The removal of blocks causes other blocks to fall and slide into position and new blocks and special items (such as block-busting sticks of dynamite) to appear from above.

As with most puzzle games of this type, the graphics and sound effects are less than dazzling. However, there are six different city settings, visualized by iconic architecture in the background: Berlin, London, San Francisco, Moscow, New York, and Beijing. Further, the action has that special mix of simplicity and strategy that makes for a compelling and addictive experience. Super NES Mouse-compatible. Also released for the Game Boy. Since the Game Boy is not a color system, the blocks have varying patterns on them.

Fun Fact:
While *BreakThru!* wasn't released for the Sega Genesis in cartridge form, it was made available as a downloadable title via the Sega Channel subscription service. The game was also released for the PlayStation and Sega Saturn, but only in Japan.

Notable Quotable:
"*BreakThru!*'s controls are a snap to learn, and the game's simplicity is what makes it so absorbing. Child Mode is great for beginners, and one- and two-player modes, including two-player cooperative gameplay, lend plenty of variety for puzzle fanatics." –*GamePro* (April 1995)

Scholastic Publishing

Breath of Fire

PUBLISHER: SquareSoft.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

You are young warrior Ryu, a sword-swinging descendant of the Light Dragon Clan. To bring peace to the land and save your abducted sister, you must travel through such exotic areas as Camlon Castle; Nanai (where you shut off an earthquake machine); Forest to Karma (poisonous spiders and beetles sting); Towers of Karma, Tantar, and Tuntar (take iron ore to a blacksmith to have him make a saw); Forest to the Dungeon (use the saw to cut your way through the woods); Dark Dragon Dungeon (where The Chief is being held captive); Cave of the Cleansing Water (the water can rid the town of zombies); and the desert town of Arad (where you battle a giant sand worm). You will even go inside a Stone Robot and use its lasers to blast a rock obstacle.

During your adventure, you'll rest at inns, learn to transform into different types of dragons, fish for weapons, buy weapons, herbs, and food in shops, and add anthropomorphic animals to your party, including: Nina, who can fly; Bo, who wields a bow and arrow; Karn, an expert lock-picker; Gobi, who casts spells for water travel; Ox, who breaks through walls with his hammer; Bleu, a master of attack spells; and Mogu, who can dig underground. You can switch control between the characters as needed. Turn-based battles, which offer a 3/4 (isometric) perspective, are random and frequent. Certain bosses can continue battling even after their health bar has been depleted. Also released for the Game Boy Advance.

Notable Quotable:

"*Breath of Fire* may not be as large as some other RPGs, and as with the last few SquareSoft games, the manual includes a rudimentary walkthrough, which makes it seem even shorter. However, it packs an awful lot of adventure into the space it has. It will do fine—at least until *Final Fantasy III* comes along." –*Game Players* (August 1994)

Insider Insight:
Writing strategy guides for big RPGs was always a challenge—so many stats and enemies, puzzles, and maps. *Breath of Fire* was no exception. It wasn't unique in the way *Secret of Mana* was. It was more typical of Japanese RPGs, but it was a really good game, reminiscent of the best of the Final Fantasy series. Although it was published by Square, it was surprisingly developed by Capcom, a company not known for RPGs. I immersed myself in the game and worked my ass off creating maps and data charts, working with my artist, Ocean Quigley, to fill it with great images. I don't remember as much of the gameplay of *Breath of Fire* as I do *Secret of Mana*. It was a long time ago, and the gameplay, while tons of fun, was not as unusual. But it remains one of my favorites among the SNES RPGs. –Rusel DeMaria

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Breath of Fire II

PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

As Ryu Bateson, the last member of the Dragon Clan, you must battle monsters, level-up your characters, travel exotic lands (featuring towns, castles, and dungeons), and search for mystic items in order to rid the world of a growing evil, and to clear the good name of your friend Bow, who was framed for a crime he didn't commit. During your journey you can build and populate your own town, hunt and fish for food (which can be sold or eaten), and add anthropomorphic animals to your party, including: Bow, a thief and rogue who's good with a bow; Rand, a strong fighter who commands some magic; Katt, a skilled arena fighter; Nina, a powerful magician; Sten, a former elite soldier with long arms; Jean, a solid warrior with unusual powers; and Spar, a creature of the forest who can communicate with plants.

As in the original *Breath of Fire*, you can only have four characters in your party at once. Unlike the first game, you have to go to certain areas to switch between characters. The top-down adventuring carries over from the original, and the random turn-based battles seem about as frequent. A text-based menu system replaces the icon-based menu of the original, and there's now a Monster Meter that clues you in on the likelihood of encountering enemies in the area. Such selectable functions as attack, defense, magic, and item remain intact. Also released for the Game Boy Advance.

Notable Quotable:

"Although not renowned for RPGs, Capcom has done an awesome job with *Breath of Fire II*. This long, absorbing game offers plenty of story turns, intense battles, and intriguing characters." –*Game Pro* (January 1996)

Notable Quotable:

"*Breath of Fire II* exceeds its predecessors in every way. The graphics are bright and well-drawn. The whole quest is huge, making for days of adventure." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1995)

Insider Insight:

The Super Nintendo is home to some of the greatest RPGs of all time, with classics like *Chrono Trigger* and *Final Fantasy III* stealing the spotlight. In the shadows of those great games was *Breath of Fire II*, a second entry in a lesser known franchise. Sadly, this is where *Breath of Fire II* belongs, as it fits the mold of a forgettable RPG, but can still be fun for fans of the genre.

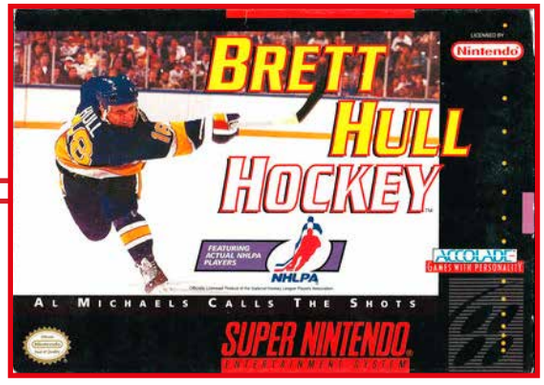
Breath of Fire II continues the story of the first game, with several returning characters and areas. Each of the colorful characters has unique actions, making them feel like special and worthy members of the team. Visually, the battle scenes are stunning, with crisp characters and monsters that unleash flashy abilities. Unfortunately, the pacing of the game and the need for excessive grinding holds it back from being great. Luckily, a few of these issues were fixed for the Game Boy Advance version.

I didn't know about *Breath of Fire II* until my stepsister started spending her evenings glued to it. I'd sit down and watch her play the later segments for hours, intrigued by the art style and cool spells. If it wasn't for *Breath of Fire II*, we wouldn't have found the common ground of RPGs, and we may have never become friends. My frustration upon playing it again recently proves that she has way more patience than I do. –Alex McCumbers

Schiffer Publishing LTD

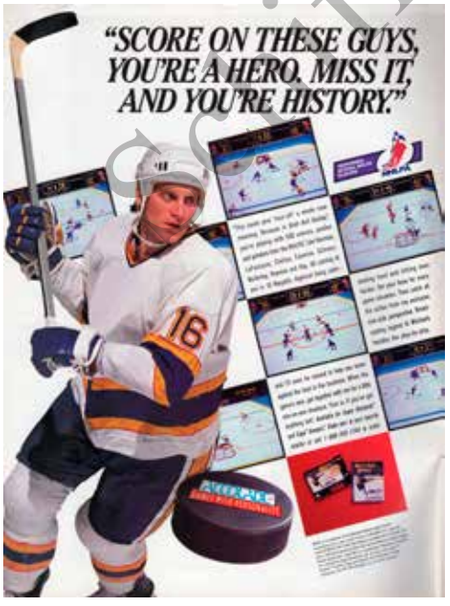
Brett Hull Hockey

PUBLISHER: Accolade.
DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Hockey, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



Fully authorized by the NHLPA, *Brett Hull Hockey* features more than 600 NHL stars (each ranked according to various attributes), including, of course, superstar right-winger Brett Hull. You can play against the computer in an eighty-four-game season, a half season, an eleven-game short season, an exhibition match, a seven-game playoff for the championship, or a winner-take-all shootout. A friend can join in on the action for shootouts and exhibition matches.

Three-time national Sportscaster of the Year Al Michaels is on hand to provide play-by-play commentary, including calling Hull by his name (other players are called by their jersey number). There are twenty-six teams represented by city names (lack of NHL involvement means no team names or logos) and two all-star teams. Options and features familiar to hockey fans include icing, face-offs, wrist shots, slap shots, offsides, checking, penalties, and fighting. At the end of each match, Brett Hull, who went on to win Stanley Cup Championships in 1999 with the Dallas Stars and in 2002 with the Detroit Red Wings, comments on each team's performance. A proposed Genesis version was cancelled.



Notable Quotable:

"This game's got a lot of features—from customized team skills to variable-length seasonal play. Al Michaels calls every play, but poor control holds it back." –*Game Players* (1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Overall, *Brett Hull Hockey* is a good, but not great, hockey game. The 'NHL' series of games from EA Sports greatly overshadows this and other hockey games for the SNES and Sega Genesis. While *Brett Hull Hockey* might not be as good as the EA Sports hockey titles, it is unique, offering different kinds of challenges for hockey fans." –All Game Guide (formerly at www.allgame.com)

Insider Insight:

When I was a kid, there was a store around the corner from my house called Joe's Video Galaxy. As soon as you walked in, there was a big glass showcase that had brand new games in it. One time I saw *Brett Hull Hockey*, and I felt like *Wayne in Wayne's World* when he sees the guitar in the store. "She will be mine. Oh yes, she will be mine," I thought. But I already had *NHLPA Hockey '93*, and my parents weren't about to pay the thirty bucks for it. "You don't need more than one hockey game," my mom said. In my opinion, that was blasphemy, and I begged them for it!

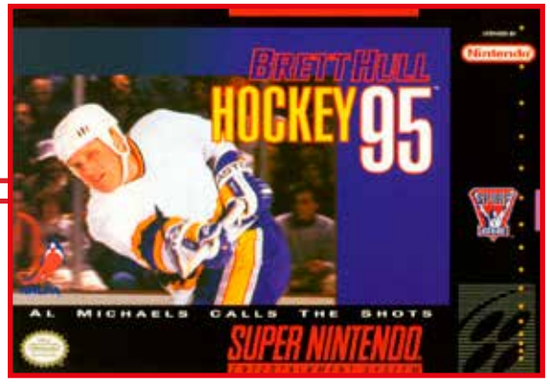
You have to understand why I wanted the game. Brett Hull was a monster in the early '90s. His eighty-six-goal season in 1991 made him a legend to every kid. I needed that game. The cover was awesome, with Hull taking a monster slap shot. But, alas, my parents wouldn't listen, and I eventually got over it and moved on. A few weeks later, the game was gone from the case, and it was like it never existed.

Just this year, I picked up a used copy of *Brett Hull Hockey* for my retro game podcast, *Gem or Junk*, and I felt like I was that eleven-year-old kid again. Unfortunately, the game has not aged well, and I came to the conclusion that my parents were probably right all along. While Brett Hull's on-ice legend will never die, this game wasn't up to the standard of the greatest goal-scoring right wing in NHL history. –Patrick Hickey Jr.

Scrifter Publishing, LTD

Brett Hull Hockey 95

PUBLISHER: Accolade.
DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Hockey, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.



Featuring play-by-play commentary by legendary broadcaster Al Michaels, *Brett Hull Hockey 95* sports more than 600 NHL stars, each rated according to skating, shooting, strength, stick handling, defensive play, and aggressiveness. Gamers can commit to an eighty-four-game season or scale things back a bit with a half season, an eleven-game season, an exhibition match, a seven-game playoff, or a winner-take-all shootout. There are twenty-six teams (each represented by city names, but not mascots or logos) and two all-star teams.

Brett Hull comments on each team's performance after each match. Other features and options include: face-offs, dekes, diving stops, drop passes, wrist shots, slap shots, checking, penalties, fighting, customizable teams, rotoscoped player graphics, Mode 7 effects, and auto or normal goalie controls. The scrolling, elevated view is from behind the skaters, giving gamers a good look at the action. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"While the SNES and Genesis version of Accolade's *Brett Hull Hockey 95* were both developed by Radical Entertainment, each is quite different from the other. The most obvious difference is the graphical viewpoint. The SNES game is similar to EA's 'NHL' games, but the rink is tilted back so you can see a lot farther down the ice. Slick Mode 7 background effects keep you close to the action." –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"*Brett Hull Hockey 95* never had much of a chance against EA's 'NHL' juggernaut, but if you give it a shot, you might just like it . . . it does deliver more exciting moments than your average hockey title. More often than not, shots deflect off the goalie or pull him way out of position, providing some golden second-chance opportunities. Players on both teams are sent scrambling when they see that open net! The game has its share of jarring body checks, and it's satisfying to lay an opponent out on the ice. Al Michaels' play-by-play sounds unintentionally comical, because he only refers to players by their number. 'Takes a hit from 60. Passes to 2. Stolen by 47. Over to 10 . . . ' The crowd noise is spirited, adding life to the arena. Between periods porno music kicks in as you view a pixelated mug shot of Brett Hull strung out on Quaaludes." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Archive Publishing

Bronkie the Bronchiasaurus

PUBLISHER: Raya Systems.
DEVELOPER: WaveQuest.
GAME TYPE: Educational/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1994.

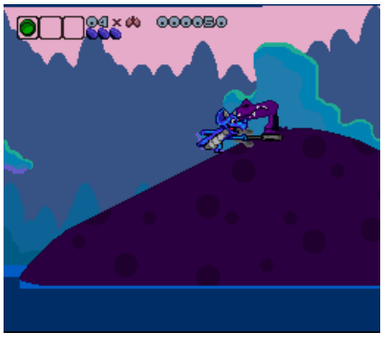
Reviewed and endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, *Bronkie the Bronchiasaurus* is a playable but subpar platformer that teaches kids about asthma, including daily medications, using inhalers properly, and managing breathing problems. Introductory text suggests that your doctor give you a plan that works best, but the game is useful, at least in theory, for putting kids at ease with their health problems.

Bronkie and Trakie, aided by sidekicks Sam and Kyla, must search for parts to rebuild a large wind machine. During the search, you, as a cartoonish dinosaur, must avoid such asthma triggers as dust, cold viruses, pollen, and cigarette smoke, which can make the screen grow dark. To battle the evil dinosaurs you'll encounter, you can hit them with a duster or blow on them. Your breath weapon is in limited supply, but you can replenish it by grabbing lung items. You will also climb poles and vines, hop on sinking and moving platforms, and more.

Friendly dinosaurs provide transportation, useful items, and wind machine parts, but only if you answer their asthma trivia questions correctly. Levels include City, Lake, Jungle, Sky, Canyon, and Cave. The game is cute but has a limited color palette. Spanish language option included. Because of its unusual theme, *Bronkie* was produced in low quantities and is very hard to find. Raya published three other educational action games for the SNES: *Captain Novolin*, *Rex Ronan: Experimental Surgeon*, and *Packy and Marlon*.

Memories:
Educational video games have been around since 1972, when Ralph Baer's original *Odyssey* was released. When my kids were little, they had fun with, ahem, *Fun with Numbers* for the Atari 2600, along with some of the Sesame Street titles for the 2600 and the PlayStation. The health care slant of the Raya line was a nice idea, but it's a shame the games aren't more fun to play.

Notable Quotable:
"When I played through the game I didn't come close to losing a single life. Even the bosses are ridiculously simple. While some of them stand still and actually attack the air in front of them in steady patterns, most just move slowly forward. They may have some sort of attack, but I always killed them before they came close. Except that charging mammoth. He could ram me wherever I stood, and not necessarily in the direction he was heading . . . It's simply an uninteresting platformer with bad controls and no original elements besides the asthma theme." –Arne Sandvik (www.encyclopedia-obscura.com)



Scrifer Publishing

Brunswick World:
Tournament of Champions

PUBLISHER: THQ.
DEVELOPER: Tiertex Design Studios.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Bowling, 1–4 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1997.

This elaborate bowling simulator is loaded down with features and options, including varying lane conditions, player reactions, and the ability to customize clothing, handedness, and ball weight (for your spare ball and primary ball). You can compete in six different tournaments (long or short) against eleven real-life professional bowlers: Walter Ray Williams Jr., Mike Aulby, Parker Bohn III, Mark Roth, Johnny Petraglia, Randy Pederson, Mark Williams, Justin Hromek, Ricky Ward, Curtis Odom, and Steve Jaros, each of whom has a mini-bio and digital photo. Or, you can select league play or a single practice game. To bowl, you line up your bowler, move the aiming arrow, and press a button to stop and start the power and spin meter. When the ball reaches the end of the lane, a close-up of the pins is shown.

Memories:
During my senior year of high school, I took bowling as a blow-off class. I knew it would be an easy "A," but I didn't know just how much enjoyment I would get out of it. Not only did I share a lane with two cute girls, it was fun to start off each day bowling and then go for donuts afterward on the way from the bowling alley to school. I began the year rolling the ball down the middle like a noob, but by the time spring rolled around, I had gotten pretty good and developed a nice hook. In fact, when a member of our high school bowling team got injured and couldn't compete in the playoffs, they recruited me to take his place. We won the championship, and I got two trophies: a team trophy and one for my individual score. When it comes to video bowling, my go-to games are *PBA Bowling* for the Intellivision, *Championship Bowling* for the Sega Genesis, and *Wii Sports Bowling* for the Nintendo Wii.

Notable Quotable:
"The animation of the ball rolling down the lane is absolutely appalling, moving in a herky-jerky manner as if it had a schizophrenic mind of its own. The close-up screen showing the ball hitting the pins incorporates realistic physics, but the pins tend to have a flat, cardboard look to them. You can see your bowler's reaction to his roll, but there's little fanfare. *Brunswick World: Tournament* really didn't do much for me, but if you're desperate for a bowling game, this may suffice. Then again, maybe not." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Schiffer Publishing Ltd

Brutal: *Paws of Fury*

PUBLISHER: Cybersoft.
DEVELOPER: Eurocom Entertainment Software.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

The Dali Llama has traveled the world in search of the greatest warriors, pitting them in a series of best-of-three, one-on-one fights against one another. Instead of the usual toughs found in such games as *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat*, the fighters are cute, anthropomorphic creatures like Kung Fu Bunny, Tai Cheetah, Kendo Coyote, Rhei Rat, Prince Leon the Lion, Foxy Roxy, and Ivan Bear (bosses Dali Llama and Karate Croc are playable when unlocked). Each fighter can do light, medium, and hard punches and kicks, along with some character-specific special moves such as bite, flash kick, fire punch, earthquake, or roar.

Brutal is a conventional fighter in some respects, but it innovates by forcing players to win fights in order to earn the aforementioned special moves. Players can also earn taunts and "katas" (automatic combos). Also unusual is the password system that does not let players pick up where they left off. Rather, it takes players to the beginning, but lets them keep the special moves they've earned, along with belt position and win/loss total. The SNES game, which was released as *Animal Buranden: Brutal* in Japan, has more sophisticated music and more realistic background graphics than the Genesis release. Known as *Paws of Fury* in Germany. The Sega CD version has cinema sequences, reworked CD music tracks, and a character called The Pantha. Followed by *Brutal: Above the Claw* (32X).

Notable Quotable:

"*Brutal* boasts some great music and some wonderful graphics. The controls over your characters are a bit weak. You can't block, and the computer opponent will drill you with special moves until you are dead. I like the fact that you learn your special moves

as you go and that you can use passwords whenever you want, but the moves themselves are too hard to do. A good fighter but not the best." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"During the period that Eurocom worked on the SNES, I spent most of the time writing audio code. The SNES was really great to work with, being sample-based and having its own dedicated audio processor. I wrote a total MIDI-based audio system for the SNES." –*Brutal: Paws of Fury* music co-composer Neil Baldwin (www.original-soundversion.com)

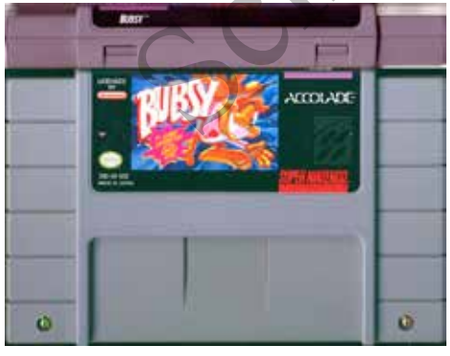
Scuffer Publishing, LLC

Bubsy In: *Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind*

PUBLISHER: Accolade.
DEVELOPER: Accolade.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

To cash in on the edgy but cute and furry mascot craze started by *Sonic the Hedgehog*, Accolade released *Bubsy*, a platformer starring a bobcat trying to save the world from yarn-stealing aliens called Woolies. Spouting digitized level-intro catchphrases like "What could possibly go wrong?" and "Whatever blows your hair back," Bubsy doesn't move as fast as Sonic (in fact, the pace of the game is rather slow), but he can walk, jump, duck, look up, look down, and glide. The manual, which includes a brief comic book story, is filled with humor, reflecting the attitude of the game, in which Bubsy hops on enemies, rides moving platforms, collects yarn, slides down water flumes, rides cars and roller coasters, enters warp caves, and otherwise makes his way through sixteen cartoonlike, secret-filled levels (called chapters), including forests, an amusement park, a desert, (atop) a moving train, and a space station.

Level titles are non-descriptive of the environments, bearing such pun-filled and pop culture-referencing names as Cheese Wheels of Doom, Forbidden Plummet, Our Fearless Leader, Beavery Careful, Lethal Woolie, and The Good The Bad and The Woolies. When *Bubsy* was released, reviewers for *Electronic Gaming Monthly* rated the game a 9, 8, 8, and 7, but it hasn't aged well. It is certainly cute, peppy, and bouncy enough, and Bubsy has fun animations (especially when he dies), but floaty controls, cheap hits, and blind jumps mar the experience. Known in Japan as *Yamaneko Bubsy no Daibōken*. The game has slightly better graphics and sounds than its virtually identical Genesis counterpart.



Notable Quotable:

"I saw this game called *Sonic the Hedgehog* and said to myself, 'Oh, I can really get into this; I can really see something.' So I played *Sonic* for nearly fourteen hours a day for a week. I was just overwhelmed by it. And out of that came *Bubsy* . . . a 16-bit platforming game with an obvious ode to classic cartoon ethics . . . released with aggressive marketing and favorable reviews." –Infocom pioneer and *Bubsy* designer Michael Berlyn (www.gamasutra.com)

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Insider Insight:
"What could possibly go wrong?" This game is what. Anyone who remembers playing it will no doubt recall Bubsy's trademark catchphrase, which ended up becoming synonymous with the game itself. The problem wasn't so much that *Bubsy* was terrible—it was just annoying, unnecessary, and overly hyped. Following the smash success of *Sonic the Hedgehog* for Sega, game publishers were in a race to deliver the next furry mascot platforming sensation. Accolade made a strong push with *Bubsy*, marketing it as the killer platforming app for both the SNES and Genesis (whereas *Sonic* was exclusive to Genesis and *Super Mario World* was exclusive to SNES).

Bubsy appeared on many a magazine cover at the time, and to its credit, it did at least appear like it was going to be a big deal. But where Accolade completely went wrong was with its annoying bobcat character, which, when coupled with frustratingly sloppy gameplay, made you want to shoot yourself repeatedly. *Bubsy* was so remarkably reviled that I can still remember video game historian Frank Cifaldi parroting the iconic *Bubsy* catchphrase in the 1UP.com offices two decades after the game released. –Sam Kennedy

Insider Insight:
During the video craze of the '90s there were some games we loved and admired, but there were also those that were, dare I say, reviled. I'm sure everyone has that one game they have gripes with, and for me that is *Bubsy In: Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind*.

I got sick a lot when I was growing up. To make me shut up and also to make me feel better, my mom would take me to KB Toys to pick out a game for my Super Nintendo. Over the years I collected tons of great games. There were a few clunkers I picked out, but the one I never seemed to stop playing, despite its less-than-adequate gameplay, was *Bubsy In: Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind*.

Fast forward about twenty-one years to 2016. For my website I've created with some friends, we decided to raise money for a good cause. Enter the "Pain in the Ass-a-Thon," where we attempt to beat incredibly difficult or terrible games within a twenty-four-hour span. I thought *Bubsy* to be a shoe in.

The day finally arrived, and I endured sixteen rage-inducing levels. I made it all the way to the final level, but I ultimately had to give up and let *Bubsy* defeat me. However, it strengthened my need to see this game beaten by my own hand.

While *Bubsy* might be forgettable for some, the game has definitely left an impression on me, and the adventure isn't over. Our rivalry continues as I plan once again to attempt to vanquish my adversary in the "Second Pain in the Ass-a-Thon."

Bubsy isn't the worst game you're ever going to play. Rather, it's a mediocre platformer with good ideas but sloppy execution. Bubsy, the exclamation shirt-wearing Bobcat, had all the charm you could ever want from a '90s video game mascot. Thanks Bubsy, for all the memories, good, bad or otherwise. –Dean DeFalco

Unofficial Publishing, LTD

Bubsy II

PUBLISHER: Accolade.
DEVELOPER: Accolade.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1994.

Bubsy II is a more ambitious game than its predecessor, but it still falls well short of such similar titles as *Sonic the Hedgehog* and *Super Mario World*. Players once again guide Bubsy the Bobcat, but controls are a bit tighter, and three hits now kill Bubsy instead of just one, reducing cheap deaths. Instead of yarn, Bubsy collects marbles (for extra points) and trading cards, the latter of which are used for purchasing portable holes (letting Bubsy exit a level at any time), T-shirts (for extra lives), a diving suit, smart bombs, and ammunition for a Nerf Ballzooka. Yes, Bubsy now has weapons (in addition to jumping on enemies), which makes defeating baddies easier.

Further, the sequel adds 2-Player Friendly mode, in which a second gamer tags along as Bubsy's niece or nephew, collecting treasure and throwing bananas at enemies. There's also 2-Player Feisty mode, which has the second gamers making things difficult by placing banana peels for Bubsy to slip on. The game boasts four difficulty levels, three mini-games (Frogapult, Armadillo Drop, and Liquid Lunacy), five worlds, and thirty levels of play, including Egyptian pyramids, outer space, forests and hills, and areas filled with musical instruments. In addition to platforming, there are side-scrolling shooter scenes where Bubsy flies a rocket and a bi-plane. The game was produced without input from original *Bubsy* designer Michael Berlyn. Also released for the Genesis. The Game Boy version has different level designs. Followed by *Bubsy in Fractured Furry Tales* (Jaguar), *Bubsy 3D* (PS1), and *Bubsy: The Woolies Strike Back* (PS4).

Notable Quotable:

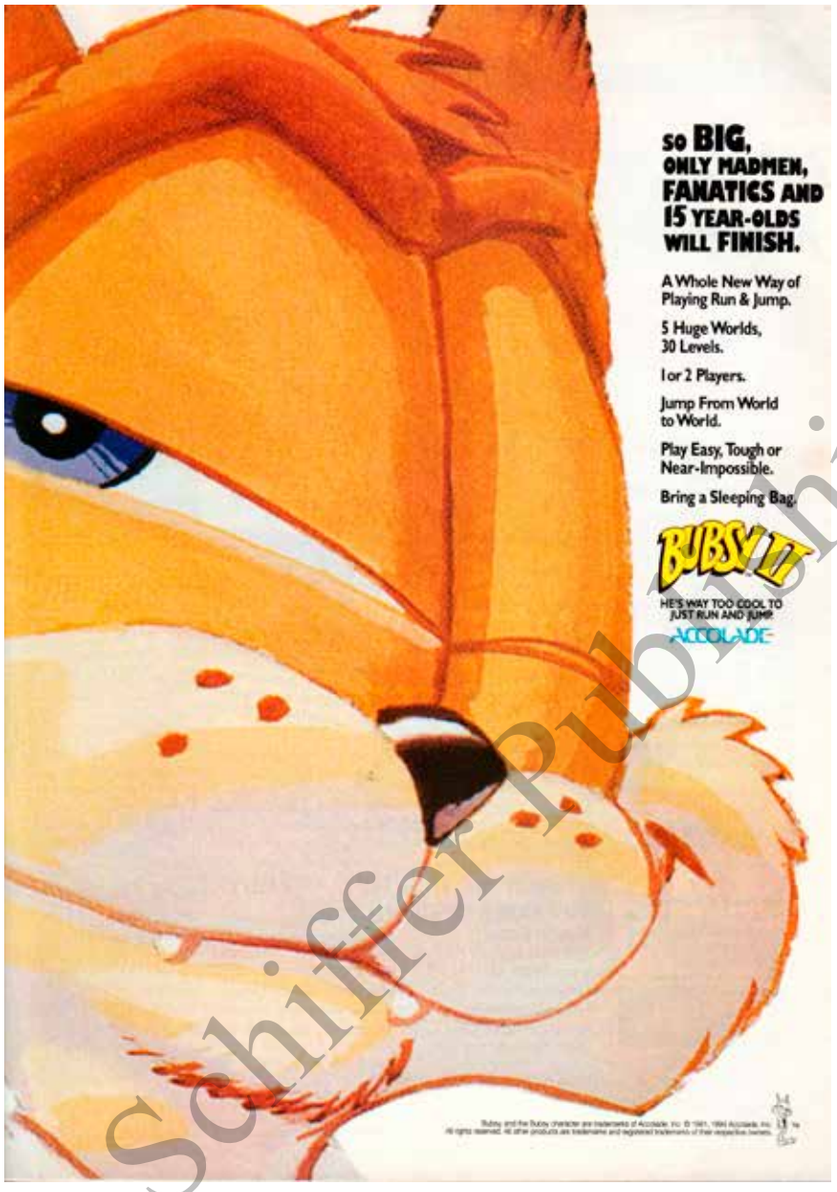
"Accolade's attempts to create a *Sonic*-style franchise continue to ring hollow and fall short of the mark. *Bubsy II* is not a very special game by any stretch of the imagination.

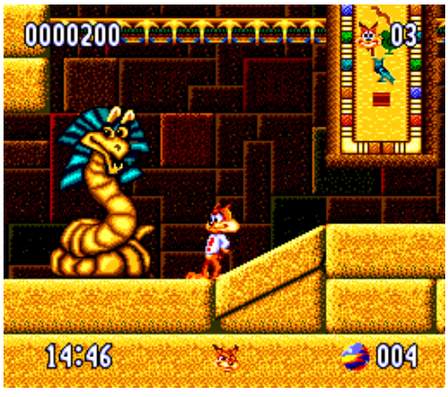
Sure, it's challenging and it's got style, but—aside from the new bonus stages—it's one egg short of a dozen in the originality department. There just isn't much to say 'cause this is one of those games that really doesn't make a very lasting impression on you at any level." –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (October 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"*Bubsy II* failed due to mismanagement of the character. It was done by people who, no matter how talented and interested they may have been, had not understood the original vision . . . Accolade's choices about doing *Bubsy II* in-house with the development team selected was a mistake." –*Bubsy In: Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind* designer Michael Berlyn (www.sega-16.com)

Schiffer Publishing





Insider Insight:

In the fall of 1993, I walked my best friend, Julie, to the end of our street in NW Portland, Oregon, and watched her load her backpack into a white VW van. A twenty-three-year-old prodigy who had received her pilot's license in just under six months, as well as landed a dream job working for a shipping company as a commuter pilot, she was heading for Alaska. She was so happy that day. My last glimpse of Julie was her hanging out the window of the van, her smile beaming from under a mass of blonde, snakelike curls, a beautiful Medusa. "See ya soon! I love you!" she shouted, then let loose a laugh of pure joy I can still hear fading from inside the van as it pulled away.

I never saw her again.

Nearly a year later, two FBI agents came to my door to talk to me about Julie and tell me that she wasn't just missing anymore but dead. They never told me exactly what happened other than she had allegedly sent a radio S.O.S. from a ship in the Bering Sea near the Pribolof Islands, an inhospitable region known for swallowing lives up without a trace. The Coast Guard combed the area, but no ship or wreckage was ever found. Then some hunters found a woman's remains in a forest near Bellingham, Washington. The body was Julie's. Nowhere near the Bering Sea. Her death was ruled "unsolved" and remains so to this day.

Although no one at the FBI could explain what happened to Julie, it was obvious to all of us who loved her what had happened: my beloved friend never made it across the Alaskan border. Somehow on her way there she was abducted, murdered, and dumped in the woods. The voice on the S.O.S. call had been a case of mistaken identity, that's all.

Julie missing for almost a year and then the knowledge of her death was indescribably difficult for me to deal with. I was filled with an agonizing despair that nothing could soothe, an ache compounded by the increasing pain of knowing she would forever exist in memories she would never grow old in.

Everyone copes with the loss of a loved one in a variety of ways. For me it was by throwing myself into video games, particularly on the SNES. Another friend, who is now my partner, used games to bring me back from my grief over Julie's murder. One of those "saving games" he introduced me to in order to lift my spirits was *Bubsy II*. For some reason there was heavy medicine in that game. Healing magic in the form of a goofy little cat who made me temporarily forget my anger and my sadness, if only for a moment, long enough to remind me that life goes on and that there are still good things in it to smile about, hold onto, and love . . . including him.

Ironically enough, Julie had a tattoo of The Cheshire Cat on her left shoulder, and she would have loved knowing that a game with a grinning and adventurous creature such as herself had been able to make living without her easier for me. She would also have loved to have known that the man who stepped in to save me from a broken heart is the very same man I chose to spend the rest of my life with. She would have loved that so much. –Catherine DeSpira

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Bugs Bunny Rabbit Rampage

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft.
DEVELOPER: Viacom New Media.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Bugs Bunny Rabbit Rampage puts players in control of the famous "wascally wabbit," who runs, jumps, and ducks through ten beautifully rendered levels of play, including snowy areas, forests, a laboratory, outer space, the Old West, and a haunted house. To thwart the enemies populating the levels, Bugs can jump on them, but he can also kick, do a spinning attack, and execute a super squat buster, where he lands on dogs, pigs, robots, cowboys, gingerbread men, and other enemies with a squat. In addition, Bugs can use a variety of ACME devices, including an anvil, black holes (which enemies fall through), a cork (which he puts in the Big Bad Wolf's mouth), exploding bones, jam (which traps enemies in a gooey mess), mirrors (which deflect Marvin the Martian's shrinking ray), pies and tomatoes (for throwing), exploding tanks, TNT, and cannonball bombs.

The title of the game comes from the 1955 animated short, *Rabbit Rampage*, which features a similar plot in which Bugs is hassled by an antagonistic animator, revealed to be Elmer Fudd. In addition to Elmer, Bugs must also face such bosses as Giant Cowboy, Bull, Yosemite Sam, Tasmanian Devil, Wile E. Coyote, and Daffy Duck. Although it doesn't handle quite as well as a game like *Super Mario World*, *Rabbit Rampage* is one of the better-looking, better-playing cartoon-based games for a 16-bit system. Released as *Bakkusu Banī Hachamecha Daibōken* (*Bugs Bunny's Insane Great Adventure*) in Japan. Bugs also starred in such titles as *The Bugs Bunny Crazy Castle* for the NES and Game Boy, *Looney Tunes: Carrot Crazy* for the Game Boy Color, and *Bugs Bunny: Lost in Time* for the PlayStation.

Fun Fact:
A game called *Bugs Bunny* was programmed by Bob Polaro and Alan J. Murphy (graphics) for the Atari 2600 in 1983, but it remained unreleased until the 2002 Philly Classic gaming convention. Bob and Alan's initials are hidden in the game, which finds Bugs walking on three screen-wide horizontal platforms while Elmer Fudd shoots down at him from above.

Notable Quotable:
"While the game can be a bit frustrating to play at first, *Rabbit Rampage* becomes very enjoyable once you get over the hump. The graphics are very cartoonlike and add to the atmosphere of the Bugs Bunny theme. There's loads of technique with lots of hidden rooms to discover. If you're a Bugs Bunny fan, this game is a lot of fun. But be prepared for some frustrating gameplay until you master it." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Working with famous licensed materials was pretty cool . . . but sometimes the feedback requests from them could get a bit exasperating. With Warner, they were unfamiliar with video games and often unhappy with the pixelation of their characters, quibbling over the perceived size of Bugs Bunny's teeth for example. I'd have to mock up examples of his teeth two pixels wide, and explain that the resolution being what it was, it was impossible to show a line down the middle!" –*Bugs Bunny Rabbit Rampage* associate producer René Boutin (www.dromble.com)

Schiffer Publishing

Bulls vs Blazers and the NBA Playoffs

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: Electronic Arts.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

The third game in the "versus" series (following *Lakers versus Celtics* and *Bulls vs Lakers*, both for the Genesis), *Bulls vs Blazers* lets players select from all sixteen NBA playoffs teams (based on the 1992 season), plus the East and West All Star squads. Once again, star players each have their own animations and signature moves, such as Michael Jordan's "air" reverse, Clyde Drexler's tomahawk, Derrick Coleman's windmill finger role, Brad Daugherty's monster slam, and Shawn Kemp's off-the-glass jam.

Other features include alley-oops, player substitutions, the ability for the player to create customized fictional teams, home team logos and colors on the courts, three difficulty levels, cooperative and competitive two-player action, and two types of five-on-five gameplay: Arcade and Simulation. In addition, a T-meter free throw system lets the player control the accuracy and power of foul shots. Games can be configured for two-, five-, eight- or twelve-minute quarters. Passwords save tournament progress. *Bulls vs Blazers* plays similarly to the previous two titles, meaning the game is slow but fairly well programmed. Unlike the Genesis version, players cannot call defensive plays or create their own All Star teams.

Memories:
Fresh off three NBA titles (1991–93), Michael Jordan retired from basketball to play baseball in 1993 and '94, but returned to lead the Bulls to three more championships (1996–98). When Jordan was gone from the NBA, my favorite team at the time—the Houston Rockets—won the title twice (1994–95), led by Hakeem Olajuwon. Even if Jordan had been playing, I still say that the Rockets would have won at least one of those championships, based on Olajuwon's dominance at the center position, and on Clyde Drexler's Jordan-esque performance during the '95 Finals. Playing as such great teams and personal favorites as the Rockets is part of the fun of such games as *Bulls vs Blazers and the NBA Playoffs*.

Notable Quotable:
"A typical EA Sports game in the fact that it's a bit jerky in animation, a bit rough looking, and inferior to its Mega Drive [Genesis] version. Don't let this put you off too much, though—it's still very playable, and packed with neat touches." –*Super Play* (March, 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"Even though *Bulls/Blazers* is an excellent basketball game, it's too similar to *Lakers/Celtics* and *USA Basketball*. I feel like I've done it all before, but if you're a SNES owner, and you're into basketball games, I'm sure *Blazers* will keep you and your friends busy for many moons." –*GameFan Magazine* (January 1993)

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Bust-A-Move

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Taito.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

A very nice port of Taito's excellent 1994 arcade game, which was called *Puzzle Bobble* in Japan, *Bust-A-Move* has you rotating a little pointer that is positioned at the bottom/center of the screen. As you rotate the pointer, cutesy dinosaurs Bub and Bob from *Bubble Bobble* are depicted doing the rotating and bubble launching. From that launching point, you shoot randomly colored bubbles (one at a time) upward at pre-arranged clusters of different colored bubbles. When necessary, you should ricochet the ball off of the walls to reach nooks and crannies in the ball cluster. When three or more bubbles of the same color touch, they disappear from the screen, taking with them any bubbles (regardless of color) that are not attached to the ceiling, side wall, or another bubble. If the bubbles stack all the way down to the horizontal line by the pointer, it's game over.

In one-player mode, you must clear pre-set bubble patterns. There are thunder bubbles that destroy surrounding bubbles when hit, flame bubbles that clear a horizontal line when hit, and water bubbles that create a stream when hit, recoloring the bubbles the water touches. There's also a boss fight in the final level. In two-player split-screen mode, gameplay is similar, but when you remove more than three bubbles in one shot, it sends more bubbles to your opponent's playfield. There are one hundred levels, which is more than three times the amount found in the original arcade game, and there's a console exclusive option to play ten computer opponents, each with different playing strategies. Also released for the Game Gear, Neo Geo CD, and 3DO. Followed by numerous sequels, including *Bust-A-Move Millennium* (Game Boy Color), *Bust-A–Move 4* (various), *Super Bust-A–Move 2* (PS2), *Bust-A-Move DS* (Nintendo DS), and *Bust-A-Move Bash!* (Wii).

Notable Quotable:

"*Bust-A-Move* is a thoroughly enjoyable and incredibly addictive puzzle game that relies on reflexes and timing. It takes a while to get used to the ricochet effect, but once that's down, it's solid gameplay. The two-player mode really shines (especially where one player can be handicapped), and the one-player game is also a challenge. This is a game that relies more on solid play than flashy graphics and effects. (The *Bubble Bobble* characters at the bottom are adorable)." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1995)

Insider Insight:

My wife Sarah bought a Super Nintendo for me as a wedding present in 1994. While we were dating, we did play some console games together (mostly NES), but not very often. I got more into gaming after our honeymoon, where I rekindled my interest in the Atari VCS and started collecting classic games, as well as buying SNES cartridges. Sarah would occasionally join me, but she would mostly watch me play.

Around this time I started going back to arcades, especially ones that had the games I played as a kid. Sarah loved puzzle games, and she gravitated to a game called *Bust-A-Move* on the Neo Geo. I was busy playing *Donkey Kong* or *Tempest*, so I never joined her. I found out a little later that *Bust-A-Move* was available for the SNES, so I bought it for her, thinking it might be something we could play together at home. She already loved the game, and I grew to love it too, despite the fact that she constantly kicked my butt. We spent a lot of wonderful nights playing the game together, and I like to think we grew a little closer because of the game.

In 2016, I participated in the Extra Life gaming marathon, and we played *Bust-A-Move* together again for the first time years. Let's just say my skills have improved with age. Aside from being a great game, *Bust-A-Move* is a big part of my marital relationship, and I cherish the memories of Sarah and I playing it together. Thanks, Bub and Bob! –Robert Ferguson

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Cacoma Knight in Bizyland

PUBLISHER: SETA U.S.A.
DEVELOPER: Affect.
GAME TYPE: Maze, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

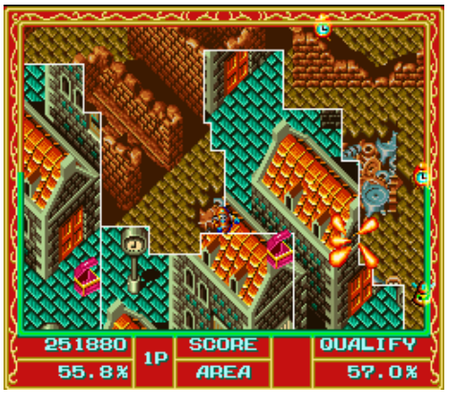
Similar to *Ultimate Qix* for the Genesis, *Cacoma Knight in Bizyland* is basically a tricked up, modernized rendition of *Qix*, Taito's 1981 coin-op classic. One or two players (cooperatively or competitively) control a boy, girl, or robot, each possessing magic chalk and varying degrees of speed and strength. The objective is to free the kingdom from Evil Queen Wagamama's tyranny and free Precious Princess Ophelia from a mirror by drawing lines on the screen and boxing in as much of the playfield as possible, avoiding enemies in the process, some of which emit projectiles. Certain enemies move along the lines you draw and can't be destroyed while others operate within areas you haven't cleared and can be killed (temporarily) by enclosing the respective area. The percentage of the screen you must clear begins fairly low and increases as the game progresses. *Cacoma Knight in Bizyland* has seven stages (twenty-one rounds in all), three degrees of difficulty, and an assortment of items to collect, including invincibility, extra lives, and speed shoes. Known in Japan as *Kakoma Naito* (*Cacoma Knight*).

Notable Quotable:

"*Cacoma Knight*, despite not offering a revolutionary concept, is still a quite addictive and fun game to play. Graphics are detailed and colorful and do the job just fine. However, *Cacoma Knight* suffers from terrible technical flaws and dramatically slows down in later stages, especially when enemies start shooting all kinds of projectiles at you. The difficulty level also cranks up rapidly which makes later stages really challenging, despite a fairly short lifespan . . . Fans of *Qix* will appreciate the variety and will definitely enjoy playing *Cacoma Knight*—but don't expect anything groundbreaking here." –Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Insider Insight:
This game begins like it will be an import role-playing game, and then quickly turns into an advanced unlicensed clone of the arcade classic *Qix*! Dropping the abstract setting of the arcade coin-op, it mixes in a few fantasy elements such as a magical kingdom, a cursed mirror, and a robot named EB93, and voilà, a brand-spanking-new take on the game!

In *Cacoma Knight in Bizyland*, you play as magical chalk whose goal is to basically collect real estate by closing areas. Doing so returns the corrupted land of the kingdom back to its initial state. So, if you get your kicks from *Qix*, you'll dig this adaptation. If you are looking for a Japanese RPG, well, you're just out of luck and won't be very busy in *Bizyland*. –Michael Thomasson



Screen Publishing, LLC

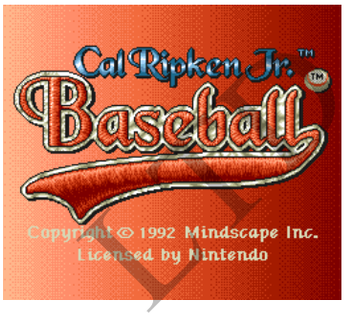
Cal Ripken Jr. Baseball

PUBLISHER: Mindscape.
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

Other than Cal himself, *Cal Ripken Jr. Baseball* contains no licensing, meaning the eighteen teams and three stadiums (domed, traditional outdoor, and one that is "tailored to power hitters") are fictional. Sixteen of the teams are named after cities, and there's an All-Star team (best of the American Division) and an MVP team (best of the National Division). Gamers can enjoy an Exhibition match or commit to League play consisting of a twenty-week season. In Exhibition mode, by holding L and R and pressing Start while highlighting any team on the team selection screen, you can play a special All-Cal game, in which Ripken plays every position, including pitcher. Other features include player substitutions, player ratings (for defense, speed, and arm strength), infield and outfield shifts, and TV-style camera angles. The SNES version of the game looks, sounds, and controls better than its Genesis counterpart.

Fun Fact:
Cal "Iron Man" Ripken Jr. played his entire Major League career—twenty-one seasons—with the Baltimore Orioles. At 2,632 consecutive games played, he holds the MLB record.

Notable Quotable:
"The simple pitcher/batter screen is easy to control, with handy windows showing runners on base. In the field, the players tend to be sluggish but have cannons for arms. The outfields are expansive, resulting in an inordinate number of extra base hits . . . *Cal Ripken Jr. Baseball*'s graphics aren't very detailed, but the players look sharp. Perhaps in an attempt to reproduce the grass-cutting patterns you see at many ballparks, the fields sport fat green stripes on the grass that look really, really bad. The control is much better than the Genesis version, except for the diving, which is terribly clumsy. The baseball has a tiny shadow that makes fly balls difficult to track down. In terms of audio, this is a pretty quiet game. Low-key background music plays throughout the contest, and an enthusiastic umpire calls strikes and outs. *Cal Ripken Jr. Baseball*'s best feature is the 'zoom window' which displays full-screen close-ups of exciting plays. These are cool but brief, so don't blink or you may miss them! All in all, this is a respectable baseball game for the SNES, but there's no way it can compete with the faster and more polished *Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball*." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)



Archive Publishing LP

California Games II

PUBLISHER: DTMC.
DEVELOPER: Silicon Sorcery.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Extreme, 1–8 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1992.

The sequel to the superior *California Games*, which saw release on numerous systems, the more obscure *California Games II* lets up to eight players compete in five short contests: hang gliding over the Pacific Ocean, skateboarding in the aqueducts, snowboarding on Mt. Shasta, bodyboarding in Santa Cruz, and jet surfing on Monterey Bay. In hang gliding, where it's difficult to stay aloft, the action scrolls right while you drop water balloons on three buoys. Skateboarding evokes *Skate or Die*, with players skating on a half-pipe course, riding through tunnels, and doing tricks. In snowboarding, you snowboard to the left down a mountain, jumping over and avoiding obstacles until you reach a ramp at the bottom where you can do tricks, and then continuing down the mountain to a beach. The bodyboarding event has you lying stomach down on the board, riding a large ocean wave while doing tricks. Jet surfing, where it's easy to run into the side of the track, is a poor man's, water-based *F-Zero* as the player, viewed from behind, surfs on a water maze that is enhanced by Mode 7 effects.

The characters you control are girls in bathing suits and guys in tank tops and shorts. At the top/right side of the screen, a "dude" named Zak comments on the action via text, using such insults, compliments, and expressions of the era as "Dweeb!", "Totally awesome!", and "Yes way!" The game was also released for the Master System, but not in America. A proposed Atari Lynx version never materialized.

Notable Quotable:

"If there's any enjoyment to be gained from *California Games II*, it will depend on one's ability to stomach repetition . . . If you hop into the 'Play Solo' mode you'll fly through the available games in less than ten minutes . . . Of the five games, only jet surfing and skateboarding even approach 'okay,' and I can't tell if it's a quality thing or just because they're easy to do well . . . [You may like the game] if you're the type of person who can put up with bad early '90s attitude, the never-ending quest for the highest high score, and simple, sports-based mini-games." –Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)

Insider Insight:

CC Music Factory's "I'm Gonna Make You Sweat" was playing on a cassette stuck into a neon pink portable boombox in a mall store in San Francisco on the day I first saw *California Games II*. I remember this explicitly because I thought it was kind of cool how the SNES was being displayed with a bunch of other electronic stuff, like boomboxes and radios in colors that matched the feel of the game. As if the store was out to sell "anything summer," a whole beach scene set up around the SNES, complete with beach chairs and fake plastic palm trees that created the feel of a small gaming oasis in a mall that no longer had an arcade. A guy in a blue-and-white polo shirt was playing the game, and a small group of people formed, taking turns trying it out, laughing each time the start screen read "Prepare to Cut Air."

California Games II was undoubtedly created to appeal to anyone who'd never been to California before but wanted to visit the one they saw on TV. Totally "Califauxnian," it had just about every conceivable stereotype about California that you can imagine, including dudes and babes who hang out on the beach with their entire collection of water craft at their disposal, calling each other "dweebs" and saying "ay, caramba!" just for the hell of it, and "yes, way!", although no one ever says "no way" first, which makes no sense at all. This game tries so hard to grab the feel and taste of Cali that you can almost smell the Hawaiian Tropic Suntan Oil and Sun-In Hair Lightener.

But all kidding aside, this is what makes this game so rad, bangin,' and totally awesome! It's a perfect total slice of early '90s kitsch where you get to cut air, chop waves, carve concrete, slice surf, and be beaucoup cool, man. It's totally killer, dude.

*Hasselhoff not included. –Catherine DeSpira

Schiffer Publishing Ltd

Cannondale Cup

PUBLISHER: American Softworks.
DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Mountain Bike Racing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Viewed from behind your cyclist, *Cannondale Cup* lets racers select from eight officially licensed Cannondale mountain bikes, each of which is rated according to turning, speed, tires, acceleration, and shocks. There are eight characters to choose from, including a mystery rider and a Mountain Demon, and eight courses comprising the fictional Tour de Grunge. There are four circuit stages: Qualifier, Regional, Champion, and Final. During all but the final race, in which you must be in first place after thirty laps, you must complete a set number of laps or achieve a certain score in order to progress.

Onlookers throw objects at you while you race, but you can repair damage by riding over items (there are also energy and point boosters). Mode 7 graphics ensure plenty of wide twisting and turning, but the graphics are muddy and ugly. The sound effects are muffled, but the grunge and technopop music fit the action, and the controls work surprisingly well. Terrain is varied, and you can jump, but the real fun is in punching and kicking other cyclists *Road Rash*-style. *Cannondale Cup* was also released as *Exertainment Mountain Bike Rally*, which was altered to support the rare Life Fitness exercise bike add-on, the Lifecycle 3500.

Notable Quotable:
"With its numerous bike options, strong controls, and the novelty of two-wheel racing, *Cannondale Cup* charges to a good finish. Racers of all abilities should take it for a spin." –*GamePro* (October 1994)

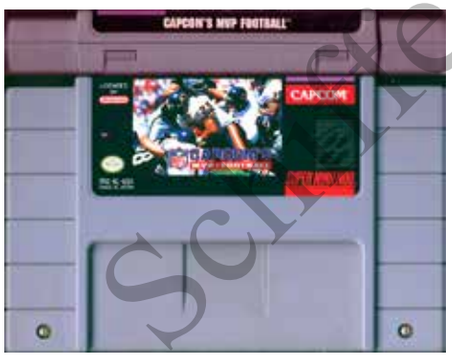
Notable Quotable:
"A different kind of competition for racing fans. I like the options and moves but was disappointed by the poor steering response and coarse Mode 7 effects." –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (October 1994)

Schiffer Publishing

Capcom's MVP Football

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Equilibrium.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

A curiously quiet gridiron contest, *Capcom's MVP Football* lacks in-game music, and you rarely hear crowd noise. The sound effects are good, as are the graphics, which present a *Madden*-esque experience in which the offense is toward the bottom of the screen while the defense appears at the top. The action scrolls vertically. Unlike most other SNES games, this one relies heavily on the "R" shoulder button (which takes some getting used to), including for such functions as passing, kicking field goals, and switching players on defense.



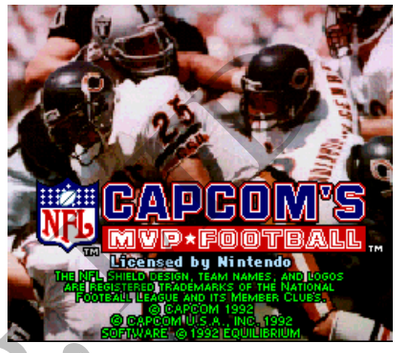
The cartridge features four game modes. Demo has gamers watching the computer play itself, while Custom lets gamers play exhibition matches, customize the components of the game, or simply call plays as the coach while the computer takes care of the rest. Tournament mode is a run through the playoffs and possibly the Super Bowl, while MVP mode lets gamers alter the details of historic NFL games. Options include quarter length, field conditions, and computer opponent difficulty level. Every team from the 1992 NFL season is represented, complete with official mascot names and uniforms.

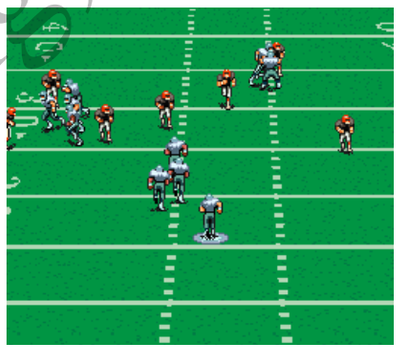
Notable Quotable:

"*Capcom's MVP Football* is a massive step up over the disappointing *John Madden Football* in every respect." –Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The NFL pimped their license to almost anyone in the early '90s, so Capcom's only foray into professional football has real NFL team names and logos, but none of the player names or likenesses. Aesthetically, the game is a clone of early 'Madden' games, right down to the play-calling screens and on-field action. The passing controls are more cumbersome than they should be, adding an extra step of selecting a receiver and then hitting another button to actually throw the pass. The lack of stats, limited playbooks, and questionable A.I. are just piling on. Excellent realism with carting injured players off the field, though." –Mr. Retro Sports (retrowaretv.com)

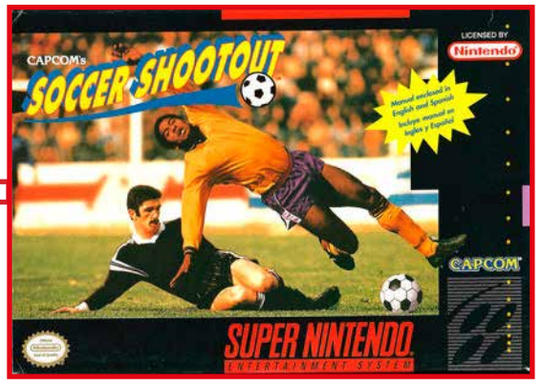




Scholastic Publishing

Capcom's Soccer Shootout

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: A–Max.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



Released to coincide with the 1994 FIFA World Cup, which was held in nine cities across America, *Capcom's Soccer Shootout* is a localized version of *J.League Excite Stage* for the Super Famicom. The programmers replaced the Japanese teams with twelve international squads, including Germany, Italy, Russia, Spain, and the U.S., each varying in strengths and weaknesses. Fans of arcade-style sports will enjoy the fast-paced action, which includes dives, headers, shoulder tackles, slide tackles, free kicks, penalty kicks, scissor kicks, short and long passes, quick shots on goal, and more.

Gamers can play an Exhibition or All-Stars match, challenge the computer to a twenty-two- or forty-four-game season, create one- and two-player teams, practice in Training mode, and compete in an Indoor Soccer match. Quarters last three, five, or ten minutes, and there are two different stadiums, each with a different grass surface affecting ball speed. The scrolling, horizontal field is viewed from an elevated side perspective. The game is similar to *Super Soccer Champ* (SNES) and *Super Sidekicks* (Neo Geo).

Notable Quotable:
"With several different game options, *Soccer Shootout* offers arcade players plenty of variety. I didn't care much for the defensive controls, and the limited number of teams will disappoint true fans, but the four-player capability and fast-paced indoor soccer mode make this game worth checking out." –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (May 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Developed by A–Max, who would make a number of additional J-League Excite games for the Super Famicom that were published by Epoch, *Capcom's Soccer Shootout* has crisp animations and a number of game options, including an indoor soccer mode with completely different physics. The controls are very basic, but the gameplay is smooth, and the game runs at a good speed . . . overshadowed by EA's monolithic franchise FIFA Soccer . . . certainly an above-average endeavor." –Mr. Retro Sports (retrowaretv.com)

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Captain America and The Avengers

PUBLISHER: Mindscape.
DEVELOPER: Realtime Associates.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

In *Captain America and The Avengers*, which is based on the four-player Data East arcade game (1991), players guide Marvel Comics' Captain America (shield), Iron Man (plasma beams), the Vision (solar beams), or Hawkeye (arrows) through five fairly routine stages, punching, kicking, and firing projectiles at thugs and at such bosses as Juggernaut, Mandarin, Ultron, Mammoth Robot, and the Red Skull. In addition, the heroes can throw barrels and other items. Each character employs some method of flight (in addition to walking), with certain areas offering rudimentary side-scrolling shooter action.

Outlandish voice effects complement the five levels of play: The Avengers, Target Town, Challenge from the Bottom of the Sea (where Namor makes an appearance), The Giant Laser Cannon, and The Final Showdown. Quicksilver occasionally runs by, leaving health-boosting life discs while the Wasp, who is activated by grabbing a "W" power-up, acts as a protector during shooting areas. A special Training Mode offers one-on-one fighting action.

The Super NES version of the game has more colors, larger sprites, and better music than its Genesis counterpart, but the Genesis game is more fun as it's faster, smoother, has better attack collision detection, and is easier to beat—the SNES game is notoriously difficult. Also released for the Game Boy and Game Gear. Much different than the NES game of the same name, which is a platform shooter supplemented by a one-on-one Battle Mode.

Memories:
I'm a lifelong comic book fan, having grown up in an era when you could buy comics displayed on spinner racks in 7-11. Even better, my mom would take me to Half-Price Books, where I could get comics for 10–15 cents apiece. As such, I was always intrigued by superhero video games, especially one as good as the arcade version of *Captain American and The Avengers*. The game at the local Putt-Putt in my town took plenty of my quarters, and I even stayed with it long enough to beat it one time. These days, if I want to play the game I fire up my Sega Genesis. I'm not a Genesis completist, but I love the box art for the game, so getting a complete copy was a must.

Notable Quotable:
"Since that Konami *X-Men* brawler game never saw a home port, *Captain America and The Avengers* for the Sega Genesis was a pretty good, serviceable substitute. My brother and I constantly rented it from our local video store and would just have a good ol' time! Something I never knew at the time was there was a SNES port of the game. I stumbled across this while in a gaming store out in Omaha and the memories flooded back. The garbled but charming dialogue. The stage-opening text crawls and panel pages of their comic book origin. Intense but freakishly hard boss battles . . . and this is on the SNES, so it must be bigger and better! I asked the

nice lad to grab it for me . . . and then he gave me a look that was a cocktail of disgust, bewilderment, and confusion. Hmmm . . . what was that about?

"Well, right off the bat, this game is impressively ridiculous. It looks like one of those generic-ass titles designed to launch a mascot, like Chuck Rock, Punky Skunk, or Radical Rex, where the character sprites have that over-glossy shine. Beat-'em-ups felt better on Nintendo's machine, so I am always legitimately surprised when the Genesis outclasses the competition . . . the poor frame rate and speed just come off so lifeless . . . you could generate more enthusiasm holding action figures in both your hands whacking them against each other . . . It's one of the least impressive brawlers I've ever seen, and this is the same console that gave us the Final Fight series, *Turtles in Time*, *Batman Returns*, and *Battletoads in Battlemaniacs* . . . It's playable, but if you've never played the Genesis version, I strongly recommend setting this copy ablaze and finding it on eBay." –ColonelFancy (somewhereinthe-midstofnowhere.wordpress.com)

Schiffer Publishing

Captain America and The Avengers (continued)

Insider Insight:
I'm sure I wasn't the only one to come out of a movie theater in May of 2012 and say, "Man, I wish there was an Avengers video game to play right now." THQ was set to release a first-person action game with the film, but sadly the company was forced to close before it came out. Ubisoft would pick up the baton with a Kinect-controlled fighting game, but that wouldn't release until much later in the same year. That left Data East's *Captain America and The Avengers*, a port of a classic arcade beat-'em-up, as the only game in town. Fortunately, I knew someone who owned it on SNES, but they assured me that it was incredibly difficult and they couldn't get very far in it. I was a veteran of games like *Final Fight* and the TMNT games, so I thought, "How hard could it be?"

It turns out the answer is "very hard." Even with the help of a friend and playing on the easiest setting, we couldn't get farther than the second stage. The title character and his band of costumed friends—Iron Man, Hawkeye, and Vision—slid around levels as if on skates instead of moving fluidly, making it near impossible to line up hits on enemies. C-list villains like Whirlwind used this disadvantage as well as their longer invincibility period to easily stop Marvel's super-team from ever even coming close to the likes of the Red Skull and Ultron.

It was a few months after my introduction to *Captain America and The Avengers* (I never had an opportunity to play the arcade game when it was new) that I found out about the far superior Sega Genesis port that you can actually finish.

Typically, when it comes to classic 16-bit games, my first instinct is to always seek out the SNES version first because, all things being equal, the soundtrack tends to be better on Nintendo's machine than Sega's. In the case of this game, however, say "OK!NO!" to the SNES version and "OK!GO!" to the superior Genesis port.
–Blair Farrell

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Captain Commando

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

This two-player brawler is a port of Capcom's 1991 four-player coin-op. Gamers control one of four commandos through nine levels of beat-'em-up action, including the city, an aquarium, a circus, a museum, a ninja house, and a seaport. In each level, you pummel mutant minions of the evil Scumocide. Playable characters include: Captain Commando, who attacks with his energy glove of electricity and fire; Mack the Knife, a.k.a., the Mummy Commando, who wields a pair of knives; Ginzu the Ninja, who battles using a sharp sword; and Baby Head, a robotic missile launcher built and controlled by an infant genius.

Other moves include punches, kicks, and such special maneuvers as Captain punching the ground to make electric current flow forward and behind him, Mack spinning his knives, Ginzu creating clouds of deadly smoke, and Baby making small explosions. During certain areas, you will ride robot walkers and motorized surfboards. The violence and gore have been toned down for the SNES version, and two enemy types are missing. Plus, a scantily clad female enemy type is wearing more modest clothing, and another fights using bombs instead of acid. The game is essentially a poor man's *Final Fight*—playable, but easier and with more of a cartoon/superhero environment. The PS1 arcade port (Japan only) allows for up to three players.

Memories:
Capcom's original mascot, Captain Commando first appeared in the manuals (congratulating the player for purchasing the game) and on the backs of such NES games as *1942*, *Commando*, *Mega Man*, *Ghosts 'n Goblins*, *Trojan*, *Section Z*, and *Gun. Smoke*, each of which is part of the Captain Commando Challenge Series. When I want to play some *Captain Commando*, which isn't often, I fire up the emulated arcade version on *Capcom Classics Collection Volume 2* for the PlayStation 2. Another way to show the title character some love is to play *Marvel vs. Capcom: Clash of Super Heroes* (various platforms) or *Marvel vs. Capcom 2: New Age of Heroes* (various platforms), where he's a selectable fighter.

Notable Quotable:
"This game corrected the SNES port of *Final Fight*'s biggest flaw and allows cooperative play for two players at once. There's also a wide variety of enemies, ranging from shirtless musclemen to shock rod-wielding women and larger bomb-throwing amazons . . . *Captain Commando* gives you nine levels, with all of them being quite short. Most of the time, the boss is the only thing worth noting about a given stage, as you'll only have to deal with a few groups of enemies before running into him (or it) . . . Way too many of the guys you'll face rely far too heavily on the 'walk slowly towards you and then attack' technique, which makes them excessively easy to overwhelm, especially since nearly all of the regular foes have pitifully short life meters and will be nearly dead after sustaining one good combo. They are only dangerous if you don't take advantage of the multi-planed fields and try to punch out three guys at once, instead of moving around to separate them for easy pickings . . . the bulk of your opposition is slow-moving cannon fodder . . . this game even makes enemy ninjas seem dull and weak. When that happens, not much can be salvaged." –Rob Hamilton (www.honestgamers.com)

Insider Insight:
Of all the *Final Fight* clones, this may be my favorite. *Captain Commando* was just so very odd in regards to character design that it stood out among the pack and became a favorite in my group of friends. I usually went with Mack, the mummy commando with the knives. (Get it? "Mack the Knife," a joke that was old even in 1995.) The other three—the titular Captain Commando who was very much a superhero, Ginzu the ninja commando, and Babyhead, the super smart baby in a giant robot commando—offered no real difference in playstyle. The choice was ninety-nine percent cosmetic, and that evened the playing field and eliminated arguments over who got to play as what character.

The only real negative feeling any of us ever had towards the game was its slowness. It wasn't a matter of slowdown. Rather, it was that the game moved slower than, say, *Final Fight* or *Knights of the Round*. Regardless, we spent hours and hours with the Captain. Two-player beat-'em-ups were plentiful on the SNES, and while some were better, none of them were quite as weird as *Captain Commando*. –Dan Ryan

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Captain Novolin

PUBLISHER: Raya Systems.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Educational/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

Endorsed by the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation, *Captain Novolin* stars a diabetic superhero who must rescue the diabetic Mayor Gooden of Pineville, who is running low on diabetes supplies. As he walks and jumps through the game's eight stages, Novolin will jump and stomp down on aliens disguised as sugary junk foods, including giant donuts, jogging candy bars, and bouncing chocolate chip cookies. The Captain also pilots a little boat that jumps on top of such enemies as floating chocolate sundaes and bottles of chocolate milk. At the end of the game, he'll confront the game's only boss, Blubberman, who throws pies.

The action is rather bland (if playable), as you may expect from an educational title aimed at kids, but the graphics are kind of cute. While the game is not a primer on treating diabetes, you must answer trivia questions about diabetes and help Captain Novolin take his insulin shots and monitor his blood glucose levels. Raya published three other educational action games for the SNES: *Rex Ronan: Experimental Surgeon*, *Packy and Marlon*, and *Bronkie the Bronchiasaurus*.

Notable Quotable:

"They do give a good effort in trying to teach people about how to manage their diabetes. However, when they developed the rest of the game, they were probably using their insulin needles for recreational drugs . . . the only thing you can do is jump, and if you hold down when you jump, that is your only attack! So congratulations, you're effectively playing as a superhero with the power of being diabetic . . . Even Wilford Brimley would probably want to break this game over his knee, and he hates that diabeet-us." –Game Cola (gamecola.net)

Insider Insight:

There was a time when one of my main goals in collecting video games was to acquire anything weird, bad, or otherwise bizarre. Everybody wants *EarthBound*, *Kirby's Dream Course*, and *A Link to the Past*, right? But nobody wants *Captain Novolin*. Who the heck had even heard of *Captain Novolin*? I had. Legend told of a Super NES game that was sponsored by and produced for a maker of products to treat diabetes. That was right up my alley. It was the Super Nintendo equivalent of *Tooth Protectors* for Atari 2600—a game nobody in their right mind was asking mom and dad for at Christmas time. Not long after Classic Gaming Expo 2003 (October 31, 2003, to be precise), this unthinkably boring oddity entered my collection. Is it fun to play? Lord, no.

You're a superhero who is not all that heroic because he can be struck down by cookies and donuts. Even if you could ignore that and try to play this game as a platforming collect-a-thon, you are again left staring at your television in frustration. You can't just pick up everything you see, FOOL! You can only collect those food items which represent a BALANCED MEAL to keep your blood sugar levels right. This is a real struggle for people with diabetes so the game certainly presents an accurate life scenario, despite supposedly featuring a Superman knockoff complete with American flag colors, so I can't fault the game for its accuracy. Video games are supposed to be an escape from the drudgeries of the real world, though.

Please take your diabetes seriously if you need insulin to live, but if you already do you never needed this video game to begin with, and nobody in their right mind—diabetic or otherwise—would want to play it anyway. I keep it in my collection, not because it's valuable, and definitely not because it's any good—I keep it because it's a reminder that the lessons of *Tooth Protectors* were not learned and that history inevitably repeats itself. –Steve Juon

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Carrier Aces

PUBLISHER: CyberSoft.
DEVELOPER: Synergistic Software.
GAME TYPE: Flight Combat Simulator, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Viewed from behind the two planes, *Carrier Aces* is a split-screen flight combat sim that takes place during World War II. Players, piloting an aircraft for the United States or Japan, engage in dogfights, strafing attacks, dive-bombing runs, torpedo strikes, and carrier landings. Each fighter, dive-bomber, and torpedo bomber you control is equipped with a throttle, a speedometer, an altimeter, a compass, and a fuel tank. You can tilt your plane left and right, climb, dive, increase and decrease speed, do 180-degree loops, fire bullets, and release bombs and torpedoes (when equipped). You can control turret guns as well.

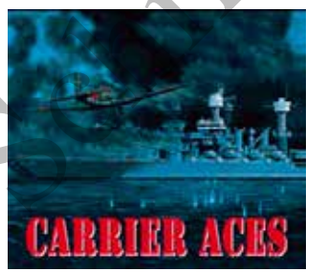
Campaigns, which are fictional, include: Scrimmage off Baguyos Island, Invasion of Turlunga Island, Defense of the Buppa Oil Fields, Defense of New Savoy Island, Battle off Ampela Point, and Action off Nunganunga. Plus, there's a training mission.

Notable Quotable:

"Novice pilots should like *Carrier Aces* the most, because its action isn't too complicated. For war veterans, the nostalgic feel of these great planes may be reason enough to keep flying." –*GamePro* (January 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"For those of you wanting a military flight sim with WWII aircraft, look no further. *Carrier Aces* does a great job of putting you in the cockpit of a classic fighter, and the strategy and two-player elements are a nice touch." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1994)



Insider Insight:

"Isn't that a bit, you know . . . racist?" asked my brother as I crashed my last working fighter plane into his carrier—KAMIKAZE STYLE—sinking it and winning that mission. "No, of course not, you're just upset you lost," I replied. He played the Americans and I, of course, was the Japanese side, the two of us recreating the hell that was the Pacific Theater of War in glorious Mode 7.

In truth, I wasn't even sure my strategy would work. My last plane was filled with holes, my bombs gone, my guns jammed, and the controls frozen as I plunged inevitably downward. One of the best aspects of the game was the way planes slowly lost functionality as they took damage, resulting in some nail-bitingly close victories. Crashing straight into the deck of my brother's carrier was actually an accident, but it did just enough damage to clinch it. During the next mission, we discovered that kamikaze-style victories were not exclusive to Japan as he adeptly used his American pilots to sink my own ships. After this, most of our two-player games degenerated into intense bouts of suicide ping-pong.

In truth, the dog-fighting in *Carrier Aces* was awful, with limited opportunity for strategy, and the fights dragging on ad nauseam as both players flew endless circles around a flat and boring arena. The real fun was when the planes engaged the ships: torpedoes and bombs versus deck guns. Discovering that the planes themselves could be used as weapons elevated the game from merely alright to amazing. Even so, my brother was right . . . It did feel a bit weird. –John Szczepaniak

Carrier Publishing, LLC

Casper

PUBLISHER: Natsume.
DEVELOPER: Absolute Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1996.

Based on the 1995 feature film starring Christina Ricci, *Casper* puts you in control of everyone's favorite floating Friendly Ghost, trying to keep Kat Harvey (the Ricci character) safe from harm. Kat follows Casper as he works his way through haunted Whipstaff Manor, searching for seven cellular integrator capsules, which are needed to power a Lazarus Machine that can cure Kat's dad, Dr. Harvey. Harvey has been turned into a blob of ectoplasm by Casper's evil uncles: umbrella-slinging Stretch, bouncing Fatso, and deadly burp-emitting Stinkie, each of whom harass Casper at various points in the game.

Comprised of more than one hundred rooms, Whipstaff Manor is alive with flying chandeliers, torches, zebra heads, bowling balls, and other harmful objects. Fortunately, Casper is quite resourceful in dealing with his ugly uncles and the treacherous house as he can find items for morphing into numerous weapons and objects, including a butterfly net, a spatula, a pillow (for soft landings), a plunger, and a wine jug (which fires projectile corks). Casper can even morph into a sword-wielding pirate, and he can turn invisible. Casper can leave the screen that Kat is on, but if he strays too far, a ghost will abduct her.

The game is similar to David Crane's *A Boy and His Blob: Trouble on Blobolonia* (NES), but *A Boy and His Blob* is better. Both can get tedious. The *Casper* film was adapted (in various forms) for a number of other platforms, including Game Boy, Game Boy Color, Game Boy Advance, Saturn, 3DO, and PlayStation.

Notable Quotable:

"*Casper* plays A LOT like *A Boy and His Blob*, but where *A Boy and His Blob* was incredible and innovative, *Casper* creeps along until you just fall asleep at the controller. And the mindless, droning music doesn't help . . . Casper is followed by Kat Harvey, a.k.a. Cristina Ricci, but she doesn't even look like Cristina Ricci. Hell, Casper doesn't even look like Casper . . . Most of the game is spent just moving from one room to another, collecting crap, and unlocking doors to new areas, as well as fighting bosses . . . Casper's ability to transform is the only way you're going to get to certain rooms, which by the way look exactly the same . . . It is quite literally one of the most monotonous games I have played on the SNES." –Nerdicus Reviews (copernicusnerdicus.blogspot.com)

Archive Publishing

Castlevania: Dracula X

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

At once a remake of and sequel to the PC Engine game *Castlevania: Rondo of Blood*, *Castlevania: Dracula X* has you, as Richter Belmont, journeying through Dracula's castle in order to rescue your girlfriend Annet and her sister Maria. The familiar walking, climbing, jumping, whip-wielding, gargoyle- and skeleton-battling action takes you through seven stages: Burning Town, Gate and Entrance to Evil Castle, Great Hall, Dungeon, Courtyard, Clock Tower, and Count Dracula.

In addition to his ever-ready whip, Belmont can equip daggers, axes, boomerangs, holy water, and watches (which slow the movement of some enemies), but these special weapons consume ammo-replenishing hearts that you can find throughout the game. *Castlevania: Dracula X*, though a quality title, disappointed *Rondo of Blood* fans because Maria is no longer a playable character. Also, the levels have been redesigned; the graphics aren't as good; the anime-style cutscenes have been removed; and Tera, Iris, and Shaft (a dark priest) are absent. Luckily, the music is very nicely reproduced, and it is still an enjoyable, high-quality title.

Although not super rare, *Castlevania: Dracula X*, which was released as *Akumajou Dracula XX* in Japan and *Castlevania: Vampire's Kiss* in Europe, is much harder to find than the far more mainstream *Super Castlevania IV*. Followed by *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* (the PS1 sequel to *Rondo of Blood*), *Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles* (PSP), and numerous other games in the series.

Insider Insight:
Castlevania: Dracula X seems to get a lot of flak in the community as being an inferior port of the sensational PC Engine CD, *Castlevania: Rondo of Blood*. However, I tend to view it as more of a reimagining of that game, utilizing everything the SNES offers to create a sensational experience. The hardest thing about playing *Dracula X* is to not compare it to the much-heralded *Super Castlevania IV* and just take the game at face value. *Dracula X* is a throwback to the classic NES games, and everything from the controls to the enemy placement harkens back to those titles, but it doesn't offer as many cheap deaths as the 8-bit iterations.

There are many amazing graphical achievements in *Dracula X*, such as the fire effects in the first level, which set the precedent as to what graphics on the Super Nintendo are capable of. Holistically, *Dracula X* is a solid experience, and if you look at things without comparing it to that other beast of a SNES game, it really does stand on its own, offering a fun gaming experience. –Jeffrey Wittenhagen

Insider Insight:
I loved *Castlevania: Rondo of Blood* on the TurboDuo. It still stands as one of my favorite games in the series. The music is just about perfect, the graphics are exquisite, and the gameplay is about as challenging as you can get, even with the addition of a backflip.

So imagine my surprise when I picked up *Castlevania: Dracula X* for the SNES and discovered that it's not quite the same game. Instead, it plays like an inspired spin-off, a game that reminds you of the greatness of the original (which didn't even see a U.S. release until on the Wii Virtual Console years later) while at the same time forging its own path.

While it's not quite as good as the *Rondo of Blood*, *Dracula X* is still a worthwhile entry in the series, just because it differs from *Super Castlevania IV*. The art style is more traditional, the music's quite good, and the gameplay is still challenging, even if the adventure is somewhat different. The folks at Konami really knew what they were doing in the 16-bit era, and both *Rondo* and *Dracula X* show it.

Nowadays, as with its TurboDuo counterpart, you'll have to pay an arm and a leg to get ahold of *Castlevania: Dracula X*, but it's definitely worth it, especially if you grew up with everything *Castlevania*. –Robert Workman

Insider Insight:
When it comes to SNES Castlevania games, I'm a bit of a weirdo; I'm the guy who got way more into *Dracula X* than *Super Castlevania IV*. Weird, huh? I guess it all comes down to timing—with no SNES in my possession in its early days, I simply missed out on *IV* until it hit the Wii Virtual Console in 2006. Whereas I distinctly remember playing all the way to the end of *Dracula X* (and never quite beating it due to the stupidly hard final boss fight), *IV* just didn't hold my interest at that point in time long enough to play through more than just the first few levels … I know! Super weird!

What's weird to me, though, is that there seems to be a degree of dismissiveness out there—almost contempt—for *Dracula X* on SNES, as it's a somewhat bastardized version of the beloved *Castlevania: Rondo of Blood* for the Japanese PC Engine (aka Turbografx-16 here in the West). But, seeing as how I was a poor college student at the time with no realistic option to import such things, I was totally fine with my localized version. I had no idea that it wasn't the perfect port, a fact that has since led Castlevania.wikia.com to describe it as "one of the biggest disappointments in the entire series."

Do any moments in the game truly stand out in my memory? Other than the aforementioned incredibly frustrating ending, no, but I do remember enjoying what I played. Contrary to some, it certainly didn't suck, and that works for me. –Chris Baker

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Champions World Class Soccer

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Park Place Productions.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Champions World Class Soccer features a fairly typical elevated side-view of a scrolling, horizontal field. Setting it apart somewhat from the pack is a small radar near the top of the screen displaying the field positions of the players and the location of the ball. The game also features: thirty-two international teams (each of varying speed, offensive, and defensive characteristics); a fifty-two-game Tournament mode; three methods for tending goal (automatic, semi-automatic, and manual); four game text language options (English, Spanish, French, and German); four different team formations; fouls turned on or off; and selectable halve lengths: fifteen, thirty, and forty-five minutes. Player moves include passes, traps, throw-ins, corner kicks, headers, bicycle kicks, shoves, slide tackles, goalie catches, throws, punts, dives, and pounces. Foreign editions featured soccer celebrity endorsements, including Ryan Giggs on the British game box, Sepp Maier on the German box, and Paris Saint-Germain on the French box. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

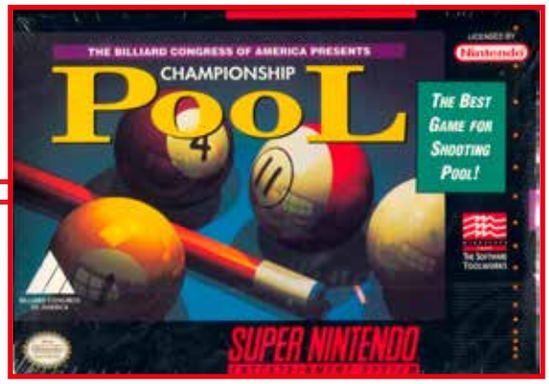
"Until they move, the players don't look half bad . . . The players are nameless and numberless, and are signified by an either light or dark team jersey, distinguished only by a pair of hair colors. Player movement is choppy, reminding me of a crappily made stop-go animation, or a soccer match between twenty-two grandfathers. With the ball in your possession, you are capable of eight-direction mobility, and a well-timed X-button special move adds some dexterity as well. Unfortunately, it generally seems like the defender is always faster, so shaking and baking will get you only so far . . . the gameplay controls in *CWCS* are incredibly frustrating . . . Although you can kick to a space and chase the ball down with your forward, you'll run into tons of problems trying to switch to the right player on offense and defense . . . As crappy and even frustrating as the controls are, there are moments of fun to be had. It's so damn difficult to score that it's a masochistic achievement when you finally do . . .

Goalies are capable of sporadically making acrobatic plays, and every now and then the computer will pull off a nifty header or bicycle kick. It's a curious feeling to know that a source of so much frustration can also offer some fun . . . I don't expect a SNES game from 1994 to resemble the most recent release in the esteemed 'FIFA' series by EA Sports, but I don't think I'm heartless for asking that a soccer game resemble association football." –SNES HUB (playingwithsuperpower.com)

Archive Publishing

Championship Pool

PUBLISHER: Mindscape.
DEVELOPER: Bitmasters.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Billiards, 1–8 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.



A first-class billiards simulator, *Championship Pool* lets gamers select from four different modes of play: Challenge (practice), Tournament (defeat thirty-two opponents in a first-to-four knockout tournament in Eight Ball or Nine Ball pool before going on to the World Championship), Party (a variety of multi-player games), and Freestyle (practice trick shots, play without penalties, place pocketed balls back on the table, and more). A cursor is used for aiming, while a phantom ball allows players to preview approximately where a hit ball will land.

Options and features include four control types (regarding banking or no banking and ease of aiming), instant replays, angled close-ups (the standard view is from overhead), and numerous pool variations, including 14.1 Challenge, 14.1 Continuous, Eight Ball, Nine Ball, Ten Ball, Fifteen Ball, One Pocket, Three Pool, Three Ball, Equal Offence, Rotation, Straight Pool, One Pocket, and Speed Ball. Endorsed by the Billiards Congress of America, *Championship Pool* was also released for the Game Boy, NES, and Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"*Championship Pool* is as satisfying as a three-cushion bank shot. If you can't get to a real table, this cart fills in quite nicely." – *GamePro* (November 1993)

Insider Insight:

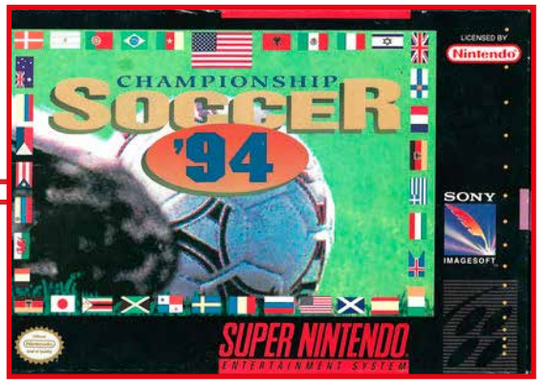
When the Super Nintendo made it to the U.S., I worked for Service Merchandise, an oddball retail outfit that seemed to always have video games on clearance. My guess is people wouldn't think to look for games at a store like that, which worked well for me, as I always nabbed games for prices that matched my minimum wage. Games like *Championship Pool* lived for the clearance rack, so I took the five-dollar gamble.

Spending the better part of my twenties and thirties in a pool hall is something I seldom admit to anyone, especially gamers, so when I plopped in The Billiard Congress of America Presents *Championship Pool* (go ahead, try saying that five times), I assumed it would be a complete turd. From my experience, most pool video games are, centering mainly around poor physics and awkward controls. Fortunately, I was wrong about *Championship Pool* as it actually resembles real pocket billiards and gets things right. It even has straight pool, the greatest pool game ever! –Dain Anderson

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Championship Soccer '94

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Sensible Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



Known as *Sensible Soccer: European Champions* in Europe, *Championship Soccer '94*, which is based on the 1992 computer game (which is also called *Sensible Soccer: European Champions*), lets players select from one hundred European club or national teams from around the world. Plus, there are customizable teams. Modes of play include Friendly, Cup League, World Championship, and Maastricht Cup (a knockout tournament), and players can design their own tournaments.

Special "after touch" controls let you control the height and curve of the ball, and there's computer-assisted passing, sliding tackles, and diving headers. Several field pitch types are available: icy, muddy, wet, soft, normal, hard, and random. Other options include game length, music on or off, seasonal weather on or off, language, and difficulty level. Rough play can lead to a red or yellow card or a suspension. Players are small, and graphics are sparse, but the top-down action moves at a rapid pace. The crowd cheers for you, but you can't see the people cheering. The Sega CD version has additional sound effects and some rendered full-motion video, such as flyovers of the stadiums.

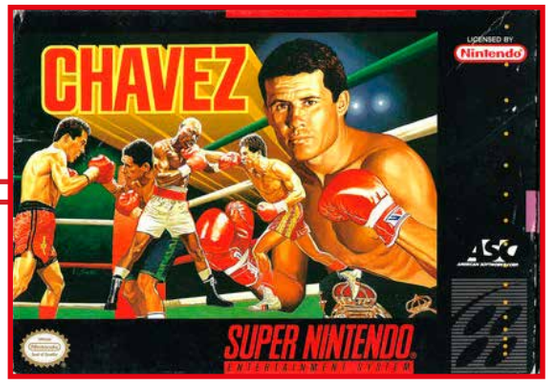
Notable Quotable:

"Real football [soccer] matches have headers, sliding tackles, volleys, blocks, etc. So do most SNES football games, but they can often seem contrived. Not so in *Sensible Soccer* [*Championship Soccer '94*], where they blend in seamlessly with the action. *Sensible Soccer* is utterly realistic, basically. Next to it, games like *Striker* and *Virtual Soccer*, though still very enjoyable, just aren't football. And this realism translates directly into playability. You don't just need fast reactions to succeed at *Sensible Soccer*; a ruthlessly tactical mind also comes in handy, making for an interesting contest against the computer and a bitterly divisive battle against a fellow human. And it's not just the game engine that's special. The customizable teams are great, as is the battery back-up, which lets you have loads of different leagues and things on the go at once, even when your Super Nintendo's switched off." –*Super Play* (January 1994)

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Chavez

PUBLISHER: American Softworks.
DEVELOPER: Malibu Interactive.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Boxing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



Chavez is essentially the same game as *Riddick Bowe Boxing* (which is based heavily on *Evander Holyfield's "Real Deal" Boxing* for the Genesis), but the manual and in-game text are in Spanish, and Riddick Bowe has been replaced by Julio Cesar Chavez, whose face is shown in close-up on the new title screen. There are twenty-five Latino boxers in all in this version, including Pablo Aldano, Alberto Baez, Hans Dobermann, Raul Ramirez, Gus Rodriguez, Ron Allen, Jose Baez, Alias Allen, Pepe Garcia, Terry Kikuchi, Beba Aldana, Tony Ramirez, Carlos Ortiz, Mighty McKay, Killer McKay, Gusto Lopez, Carlos Rogas, Cristo Rogas, Manual Vargas, Gerardo Zerate, Speedo Garcia, Ron Ronaldo, Carlos Duran, and Tony Lopez. Another difference is that *Chavez* has in-game ads for such products as Doritos, Pepsi, and Sabritas positioned along the top of the screen.

Prospective pugilists can create and save up to seven of their own boxers (which are cartoonish in appearance), customizing such features as name, face, gloves, and trunks. After each fight, players can increase the power, speed, and/or agility of their character. Released primarily in Mexico and the Southwestern United States, *Chavez* is a rare game that goes for big bucks in the collector's market.

Notable Quotable:

"Mexico's most popular sports hero is now Mexico's most popular video game hero. Julio Cesar Chavez the boxer is a devastating 140-pound tiger. Unfortunately, the video game is a routine 16-bit cart. The abundant options are the game's strong points . . . The fights themselves should be dominant, but regrettably they aren't. The actual battles are ordinary. Fighters lumber around the rotating ring and throw the usual assortment of punches with moderately effective controls. The side-view graphics keep you uninvolved—there's absolutely no blood or visible damage as these big, cartoony boxers get pummeled, and the onscreen meters are only somewhat helpful. The sounds also lack any life. Thunderous sound effects, rowdier crowds, and a better variety of taunts would've enabled this game to go the distance." – *GamePro* (April 1994)

Cliffer Publishing

Chavez II

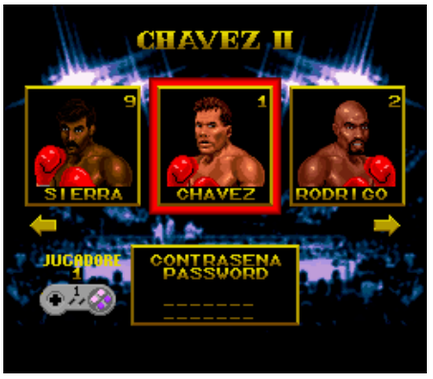
PUBLISHER: American Softworks.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Boxing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Chavez II is similar to *Boxing Legends of the Ring* (in fact, it uses the same game engine), but instead of eight real professional boxers, it features only one: Julio Cesar Chavez. The view is from behind the player's boxer (à la *Super Punch-Out!!*), with gamers using hooks, jabs, uppercuts, crosses, straights, and a super punch to fight their way to victory or defeat. There are two game modes: Exhibition and Career, the latter of which lets players create their own boxer in terms of appearance, name, and fighting style (military, street, or Olympic).

Created boxers vary in terms of punch power, chin, and stamina, and gamers can distribute strength points to their boxer's various types of punches. Ranked 10th at the beginning of the game, players work their way up the ranks, earning more distributable strength points as they go. Passwords save the created fighter and career progress. Much of the in-game text is in Spanish, but the manual is fully bilingual. This hard-to-find game was also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

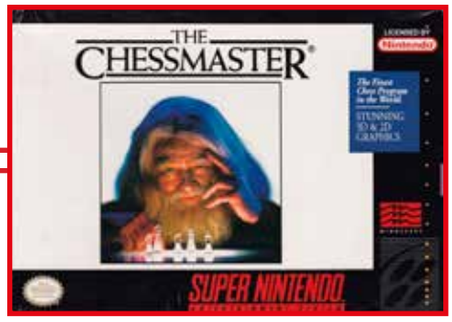
"*Chavez II* is a fun boxing game, but it's a bit disappointing that the overall game hasn't changed at all since it first appeared as *Legends of the Ring* eighteen months ago. Unless you're a huge fan of Julio Cesar Chavez, I'd recommend you track down a copy of *Legends* for its wider variety of famous boxers." –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (January 1995)



Schiffer Publishing

The Chessmaster

PUBLISHER: Mindscape.
DEVELOPER: The Software Toolworks.
GAME TYPE: Board Game, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.



Like its NES counterpart, *The Chessmaster* for the Super NES is a respectable console take on the popular computer chess series (which began in 1986, with *The Chessmaster 2000* for home computers). Both offer such options as sixteen levels of difficulty, a teaching mode, and customized scenarios, but the SNES version features a tilted, pseudo-3D view of the board in which a hand moves pieces that are drawn in greater detail (a standard 2D mode is also available). In addition, a pair of clocks at the top of the screen keeps track of how long it takes each player to move.

You can play the game against the Chessmaster or a human, or you can select Autoplay, in which the Chessmaster plays himself. When it's your turn, you can change sides and have the Chessmaster play your pieces while you play his. Other features and options include taking back some or all of your moves, a Staunton (standard) or fantasy chess set, Deep Thinking on or off (when it's on, the Chessmaster thinks about his move during your turn), and opening book on or off (when it's on, the Chessmaster can consult its library of more than 150,000 positions during the early part of the game). In the War Room, the chessboard is smaller, and you can view such informational features as the last four moves by each player, the best line of moves the Chessmaster has found so far, the captured pieces, and the number of moves ahead the Chessmaster is thinking about. Also released for the Game Boy and Game Gear.

Fun Fact:
The wizened Chessmaster depicted on the box for the game is character actor Will Hare, who appeared in such films as *The Wrong Man* (1956), *Black Oak Conspiracy* (1977), *The Electric Horseman* (1979), *Eyes of Fire* (1983), *The Aviator* (1985), *Back to the Future* (1985), and *Me and Veronica* (1992). He also guested on numerous TV shows, including *The Dukes of Hazzard*, *Lou Grant*, *The Bionic Woman*, *The Streets of San Francisco*, and *The Defenders*. He enjoyed a long career before passing away in 1997, at the age of eighty.

Memories:
Longtime chess fans who also play video games will recall *Video Chess* for the Atari 2600. It was serviceable for beginners, but took minutes and sometimes hours to make moves in the harder difficulty levels, making the game all but worthless for good chess players. During that era, gamers were much better off playing computer chess simulators instead of console chess. Later, console fans got a quality sim in *The Chessmaster*, which I experienced primarily on Sega's Game Gear. During long car trips, when my wife would take the wheel (my dad drove every mile on our family vacations when I was a kid, but when I got a family of my own, we shared driving duties), it was awesome having something to pass the hours while at the same time brushing up on my (admittedly mediocre) chess skills.

Insider Insight:
My older brother, Alex, initially taught me "the game of kings," although we were more like pawns. He told me the rules and some strategic moves, but never enough to really compete against him. For that I had to join the chess club in grade school. I entered a few tournaments as I moved through middle school, high school, and even college, but it wasn't until *The Chessmaster* dropped on the Super Nintendo that I really learned to excel in the sport.

Like many chess simulators, *The Chessmaster* on the Super Nintendo allows takebacks and replays without the grumbling of a human competitor. Such forgiveness allowed me to fine-tune my game over time. Now, after playing it on the SNES for almost three decades, I'm proud to say that it was an excellent tutor, and I am now ranked by The United States Chess Federation (USCF) as a certified Senior Master, only one category below a Chess Grandmaster. Eat that, big brother! –Michael Thomasson

Insider Insight:
As an adolescent, I was awful at chess. My ineptitude showed one day during my seventh grade history class, circa early 2000s. One of our major classic projects was to learn and play chess in a competition format, but I could not for the life of me remember what each piece could do.

One afternoon my teacher pulled me aside and said, "Hey, I know it's old now, but do you still own a Super Nintendo?" I chuckled a bit and proclaimed that yes, I did still have one. He then told me about the game *The Chessmaster*. He said that his kids had it, and that instead of playing in the tournament, I could play *The Chessmaster* in front of the class and explain each move and strategy. I practiced the game all week until I understood what was going on, and I ably demonstrated my newly found skills to my classmates.

To this day, I credit *The Chessmaster* for teaching me chess so quickly. My experience with the game lead to the formation of my business, Fuzgama, which is a small gaming museum established in 2016, in rural Michigan. We use gaming to help people learn skills and general knowledge instead of the traditional method of textbooks. –Adam Burkholder

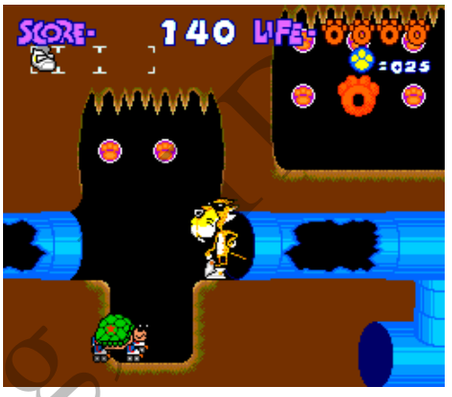
Schiffer Publishing LTD

Chester Cheetah:
Too Cool to Fool

PUBLISHER: Kaneko.
DEVELOPER: System Vision.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

Chester Cheetah: Too Cool to Fool puts players in the role of the cartoon Cheetos mascot ("It's not easy being cheesy!"), who is being held captive at the Four Corners Zoo by evil zookeeper Mean Eugene. To try and escape, Chester orders a motorcycle, but Eugene steals it and hides the parts all around the zoo. To retrieve the parts, Chester must walk, crawl, run, climb, ride (a boat and a mine cart), and jump (on platforms and enemies) through five levels: Four Corners Zoo Park (lots of sewer pipes), Monkey Pits (jungle theme), Gator Alley (lots of water), Hidden Caves (includes mine cart sequence), and Bird House (Chester can fly in this level). In order to beat each level, Chester must find the motorcycle part.

Hip-O and Funky Monkey are on hand to help, and Chester can grab such useful items as Cheetos paw snacks (health), sunglasses (reveal hidden badges), guitars (invincibility), sneakers (for dashing), skateboards (for entering bonus stages), and paw badges (one hundred of which grant an extra life). The game is playable, but has a crude, cartoony look, and the action is slow and even frustrating at times. In addition, the controls have a delayed reaction, and there's really no weaponry to speak of beyond jumping. The SNES version has better music than its Genesis counterpart. Similar to *Bubsy In: Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind*.



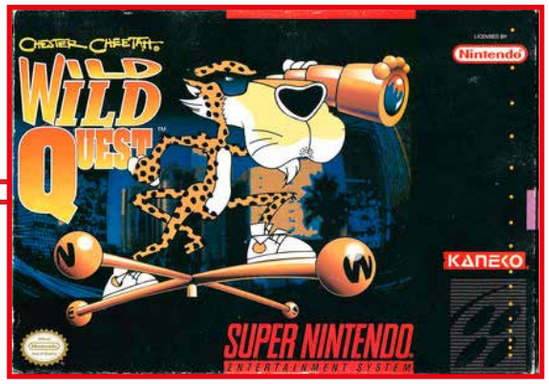
Notable Quotable:

"It is unlikely that Cheetos spokes-feline Chester Cheetah is going to give the Mario Brothers any sleepless nights . . . he has neither the charm nor the content to get him over in gaming . . . The game seems to have a zillion power-ups, few of which possess even the most tenuous logical continuity with one another . . . The graphics are pleasant, but there is very little visual background to suggest that Chester is in a zoo, or anyplace else in particular . . . Chester's lack of offensive output leaves the player with nothing to do but jump. And jump. And jump. This game seems to be a rushed project—more thought and game programming could have alleviated the sparse offensive capabilities." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1993)

Source Publishing

Chester Cheetah:
Wild Wild Quest

PUBLISHER: Kaneko.
DEVELOPER: Kaneko.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.



In this sequel to *Too Cool to Fool*, Mean Eugene has hidden Chester's map to Hip City and destroyed it, spurring the Cheetos mascot on a countrywide quest to retrieve the map pieces. Chester will walk, run, and jump (on platforms and on birds, pigs, penguins, flying fish, skateboards, crabs, vultures, sharks, and other enemies) through such cities as Euphreaka (Northern California beach), Omahog (Nebraska farm), Not-So-Great Falls (Mountainous Montana), Un-Clearwater (Florida swamps), and Little Shock (Arkansas power plant). In each level, Chester must find a piece of the map prior to exiting, and at the end of each level he must fight a boss, such as a fat lady toting beach gear or a guy in a flying saucer that is equipped with a hook and a spike. Once Chester retrieves all the map pieces, he must face final boss Mean Eugene in a side-scrolling car race.

Chester will also grab bags of Cheetos (for a hit point—when carrying one, he won't die when hit by an enemy) and individual Cheetos Paws (for points added to your score). As in the vastly superior *Super Mario World*, Chester enters the levels in non-linear fashion via a world map (shaped like the United States in this case). Hampered by cheap hits and poor collision detection, *Wild Wild Quest* nevertheless looks, sounds, and plays better than *Too Cool to Fool*, but that's not saying a whole lot. Both games have ridiculous instruction manuals filled with forced rhyming. The SNES version has slowdown problems that the Genesis game lacks.

Notable Quotable:

"The gameplay in *Wild Wild Quest* is fairly different than its prequel. The mechanics and sprites are completely redone and, in most cases, of much higher quality. For example, the artists went through the trouble to put shading on things. Now that he's out of the zoo, Chester has decided to add a bit of pep to his walk and goes at about twice the speed that he did in *Too Cool to Fool*. Chester can also dash without the need for a power-up and perform super jumps." –Giant Bomb (www.giantbomb.com)

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Choplifter III:
Rescue Survive

PUBLISHER: Extreme Entertainment Group
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

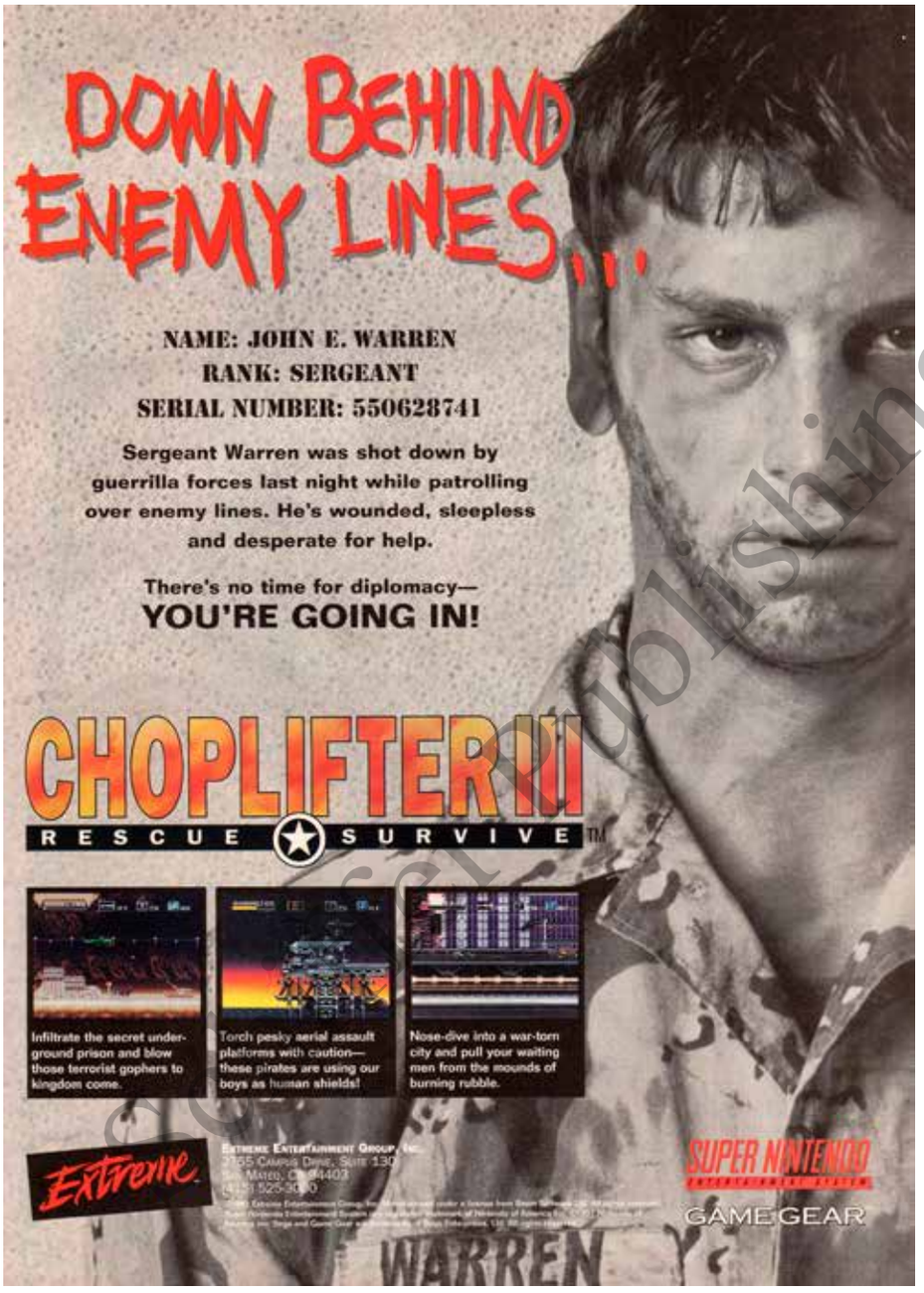
A sequel to the popular Apple II computer game from 1982, which was developed by Dan Gorlin, *Choplifter III: Rescue Survive* takes advantage of the 16-bit format with nicely detailed graphics but keeps the basic action intact and amps it up with larger numbers of enemies. After lifting off from your base, you pilot a helicopter over a side-scrolling jungle (with mountains in the background), avoiding enemy fire from cannons, tanks, and soldiers (including parachuting soldiers), occasionally landing to rescue POWs that will walk aboard your chopper after you fully land. Then you fly the hostages to your base, where you land and let them exit. Sometimes you'll need to destroy enemy encampments to release the hostages from captivity so you can rescue them. Your chopper is equipped with unlimited ammo for the standard gun, and you can also fire such secondary weapons as missiles and napalm.

You use the d-pad to move your helicopter, of course, but you'll need to press the shoulder buttons to pivot your helicopter to the left, right, and center of the screen. When your helicopter is facing left or right, you shoot downward at an angle. When facing center, you shoot straight down. Bosses, which are giant cannons and tanks that appear every few waves, take many shots to destroy. After the jungle level, the scenery changes to a desert, then a sea, and then a city. *Choplifter III: Rescue Survive* for the SNES, which is different from *Choplifter III* for the Game Boy, is a follow-up to *Choplifter II: Rescue Survive* for the Game Boy. A game called *Choplifter III* was released for the Game Gear, but it's actually an adaptation of *Choplifter II: Rescue Survive*.

Notable Quotable:

"Usually when the word 'addictive' is mentioned it is often read as 'basic,' but this is not the case here. Players enjoy a very high level of control over the A 90, which is an absolute necessity when performing the monstrous tasks set before it. Obviously the sprites are tiny but this doesn't affect the high degree of detail used in their presentation. This miniaturization of everything also serves to provide the game's bosses with maximum impact when they appear, because they're pretty huge to begin with anyway! There's definitely a big scare appeal to *Choplifter III* in that the nerves are tested quite severely for the duration. It is impossible for anyone playing this game not to squirm in their seat as enemy fire litters the screen, expertly marking the copter, with only one last hostage to save!" *–Nintendo Magazine System* (April 1994)

Choplifter Publishing, LTD



Insider Insight:

I first saw *Choplifter III: Rescue Survive* at the Consumer Electronic Show (CES) inside the walls of Chicago's McCormick Place, the largest convention center in the United States. I was a software reviewer for several video rental chains at the time, and was literally paid to play and then make order recommendations immediately following such events. Anyway, the new *Choplifter* was on display a few booths away from the SNES premiere of *River Raid: Mission of No Return*, which ironically never did return as it was ultimately cancelled. Being a fan of classic game revivals and aviation games in general, these two titles were the two games that I left the tradeshow wanting to play again the most.

Fortunately, *Choplifter III: Rescue Survive*'s future fared much better than that of *River Raid: Mission of No Return*, and actually made it to store shelves. I first played the rudimentary Apple II original as a port on the ColecoVision. I lost much of my youth playing the game and being shot down by tanks . . . repeatedly. The Super Nintendo update was more of the same, only very pretty! It was downright beautiful for the time, and it played tight, too! Plus, if you cranked up the audio, it sounded like a thundering warzone. In the game you'd guide your helicopter into enemy territory, raid the prison camps, rescue the hostages, and then safely return them to home soil. The SNES version adds more terrain, including a jungle, an ocean level, battles in a cityscape, and finally conflict in the desert. Also new to the Super Nintendo version were supply crates, mid-level bosses, and other sugar-coatings.

Choplifter III: Rescue Survive is one of the few updated games I've played that kept faithful to the original and didn't mess with the formula too much, breaking the game in the process. As a result, I suggest that it plays better than the '82 original, and that is a brave and bold statement considering how much the first release was adored and loved. *Choplifter III* is one of those games that will have you playing late into the night saying to yourself, "just one more sortie!" –Michael Thomasson

Retro Publishing LTD

Chrono Trigger

PUBLISHER: Square.
DEVELOPER: Square.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

One of the most revered role-playing games in the history of the industry, *Chrono Trigger* puts players on a quest through time to rescue a girl named Marle and defeat Lavos, a creature destined to destroy the world. Gameplay involves such standard RPG elements as visiting towns, exploring dungeons, and engaging in turn-based creature battles (using magic and "techs"), but players can combine character abilities to perform double and triple attacks.

There are seven playable characters, with a maximum of three in the party at any one time: Chrono (swordsman, lightning magic), Marle (crossbow, water magic), Lucca (builds weapons and machines, uses fire magic), Frog (swordsman, water magic), Robo (electric weapons), and Ayla (wields a stick, strong enough to break stones with a punch or kick). Other features setting *Chrono Trigger* apart from the pack include gorgeous graphics, an epic musical score, engaging side quests, and many different endings.

While not super rare, the cartridge is fairly hard to find, highly sought after, and commands big bucks on the collector's market. The Nintendo DS and PlayStation versions, the latter of which is one of two games on *Final Fantasy Chronicles*, added an anime-style introduction movie, cutscenes, and a Movie Theater mode that lets you re-watch the movies and listen to the game's songs. Plus they have an unlockable bestiary, an art gallery, and dungeon maps. Called *Hepburn: Kurono Torigā* in Japan. Followed by *Chrono Cross* (PlayStation).

Notable Quotable:
"Square is best known for *Final Fantasy*, and for good reason . . . Square isn't a one-trick pony, though, and the company made many other great RPGs, such as *Secret of Mana*, *Xenogears*, and *Vagrant Story*. Of all those, however, *Chrono Trigger* on SNES is king of the hill. The time traveling enabled lots of room for exploration, and brought forth some truly interesting characters, all created by *Dragon Ball*'s Toriyama. What other game would have a party consisting of a medieval frog, a futuristic robot, and an Amazon? These partners in quest could team up for dazzling combo attacks. The actions you picked affected the way the story unfolded, leading up to fifteen different endings. You could even recruit the main bad guy. *Chrono Trigger* is the stuff legends are made of." –*Game Informer* #100 (August 2001), which ranked *Chrono Trigger* the 15th greatest video game of all time.

Notable Quotable:
"*Chrono Trigger* is the pinnacle of the JRPG genre, with impeccable music, a brilliantly paced story, and well-balanced gameplay that never overwhelmed players yet still provided an engaging and adequate challenge. When it was first released on the SNES, the game was praised by critics and fans alike, but it's not simply nostalgia that drives the hype behind the classic game. The reason *Chrono Trigger* remains so well-regarded is that it has stood the test of time. Despite all the modern advances in graphics and gameplay, *Chrono Trigger* maintains its quality and is just as fun to play today as it was when it was originally released . . . It's an RPG masterpiece." –Digital Trends (www.digitaltrends.com), which ranked *Chrono Trigger* the 3rd best SNES game.

Sherer Publishing, LLC

Insider Insight:
Chrono Trigger looked like a dream. Developer Square innovated in a lot of areas that other games hadn't. Rather than bombard players with a series of random encounters, enemies appeared on-field and could ambush you or be avoided altogether. Your party members participated in devastating combo attacks that looked incredible and felt rewarding. The game's time-traveling story allowed for a diverse cast of characters and provided some clever plot twists. Everything about *Chrono Trigger* screamed "awesome." The only problem was that I couldn't get my hands on a copy long enough to experience it all.

When *Chrono Trigger* first released, I eventually talked a friend into loaning me his copy. Unfortunately, I was only able to play through about a quarter of the game before my friend moved away, taking the game with him. Six months later, I got a copy of my own. Sadly, it was the victim of a brotherly argument that began over who got to play with the SNES and ended when I threw the *Chrono Trigger* cartridge across the room. I was "tossing" the game to my brother, but my aim was off, and it went soaring out a third story window before cracking against the pavement.

Years later, when *Chrono Trigger* rereleased for the Nintendo DS, I vowed to finally finish the game. Unfortunately, I left my DS on a plane and lost another several hours of progress. However, this time I didn't give up; I tracked down another copy of the game and finally finished it!

Even after completing Square's masterpiece RPG twenty years after its release, and having to play through the start of that game four times, I was blown away by its craftsmanship. The best thing I can say about *Chrono Trigger* is that it stands the test of time. –Benjamin Reeves

Insider Insight:
Chrono Trigger has so many great aspects: the enthralling story, the character and monster designs by the legendary creator of *Dragon Ball*, Akira Toriyama, and the multiple endings (SO many endings!), just to name a few. But the one thing that really hooked me was the music. The soundtrack for *Chrono Trigger* is probably my favorite video game soundtrack of all time and was the first soundtrack I made the effort to find and purchase. Considering that this was around 1995 or '96, well before the internet made nearly everything easy to acquire, the only way to get imported video game merchandise (especially if you lived far from any major metropolitan area like New York City) was to go to Japanese animation conventions.

Back then, anime cons weren't as prevalent as they are today, with the East Coast only hosting a handful of decent-sized conventions during that era. The scarcity of these conventions and my limited ability to only attend the ones closest to me made it that much more difficult to find this soundtrack. It didn't help that the soundtrack kept selling out in the dealer's rooms of each con before I could find it! I swear, this thing was harder to find than Capcom art books (my other Holy Grail for conventions). But find it I did, eventually—years later—and it was very much worth the chase.

Chrono Trigger Original Sound Version is three CDs worth of 16-bit bliss that I still play selections from to this day. Yasunori Mitsuda, Nobuo Uematsu, and Noriko Matsueda: thank you for creating this soundtrack. You deserved every accolade you received for this masterwork. –Thor Thorvaldson

Insider Insight:
With *Chrono Trigger*, gamers enjoyed a rare treat: a collaborative effort from the teams responsible for two of the world's most popular role-playing games: *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest*. It's hard to imagine that kind of creative team-up with any franchises of such magnitude—can you envision the Mario and Sonic teams trying to put something together? — but whatever behind-the-scenes friction may have occurred during its creation between giants like Hironobu Sakaguchi and Yuji Horii, the end result played with silky smoothness.

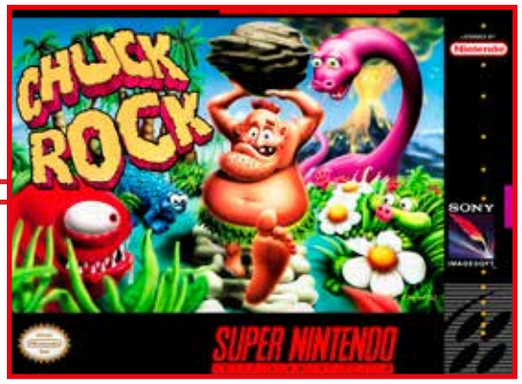
Chrono Trigger didn't lack for *Final Fantasy*'s Sturm und Drang, but it tempered that grandiose melodrama with a cast of likable characters. It also managed a brilliant balancing act with its systems, presenting players with involving, yet magnificently uncomplicated battle mechanics. And to top it all off, *Chrono Trigger* refused to overstay its welcome; its lean quest spanned millions of years yet could be completed in less than two dozen hours. We kept playing anyway, though, thanks to the brilliant New Game+ feature that allowed us to explore the many different permutations of alternate timelines without having to restart the quest from zero.

A charming cast, an accessible system, a fun story that begged for exploration, and topflight visuals and music—this was rare RPG alchemy. Is it any wonder people regard *Chrono Trigger* as one of the greatest role-playing games of all time? –Jeremy Parish

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Chuck Rock

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Core Design.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

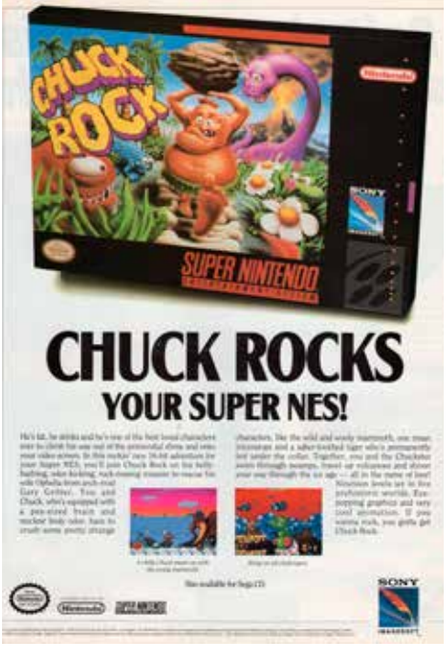


Adapted from the 1991 computer game, *Chuck Rock* has players guiding the grunting, groaning caveman as he walks, ducks, jumps, and sometimes swims through five multi-stage levels of prehistoric pitfalls, perils, and light puzzles: The Law of the Jungle; If You Can't Take the Heat, Get Out of the Volcano; In the (Primordial) Soup; Chuck Chills Out in the Ice Age; and Dead Dinos—or Are They? To battle the stone-age beasts he'll encounter, Chuck uses a belly-butting maneuver, a jump-kick attack, and some nifty rock-throwing abilities. Rocks also help Chuck sink under ocean creatures, form steps across treacherous terrain, and, with the help of crocodiles, propel himself upward. In addition, Chuck hops on frogs (to cross water), gobbles food for extra points, fights dinosaur bosses, gets fired through the air from the trunks of wooly mammoths, and more.

Although it's not on par with such top-notch side-scrollers as *Super Mario World* and *Earthworm Jim*, *Chuck Rock* is fairly enjoyable, with humorous animations, cartoonish graphics, and ample challenges (the game could use continues). The Genesis rendition has better controls than the SNES version. The Sega CD port has animated intros, superior sound, and nine new stages (for a total of twenty-eight). Also released for the Game Boy and Game Gear. Followed by *Chuck Rock II: Son of Chuck* (Sega CD, Genesis, Game Gear) and the go-kart game *BC Racers* (Sega CD, 32X, 3DO).

Notable Quotable:

"*Chuck Rock* features the trifecta of obnoxious, groan-inducing, side-scrolling levels: cave, water, and ice. It's almost as though the developers did this intentionally, in an effort to show that these sorts of levels don't necessarily have to be awful. They succeeded. The levels are tolerable, though by no means amazing . . . *Chuck Rock* gets what so many side-scrollers don't understand: that life bars are good, and insta-deaths are bad. There isn't a single insta-death in the entire game, not even if Chuck takes a nosedive into a pit of acid. Curiously, though, eating food does nothing to replenish Chuck's life whenever he does take a hit. All it does is add points to your total score, which doesn't actually serve any purpose . . . You're pummeled constantly from every direction in *Chuck Rock*. There are ample hearts scattered throughout the levels, and you'll need to devour every last one if you ever want to accomplish whatever it is Chuck is trying to accomplish . . . *Chuck Rock* features quite possibly the greatest primary weapon in video game history. But beyond just the main character's stomach, *Chuck Rock* is a cool game. Its levels are short and vaguely innovative, and it's the sort of game you'll want to come back to and see how quickly you can beat it, or how many different ways you can beat it." –Paul Franzen (gamecola.net)



Chief Publishing, LLC

Civilization, Sid Meier's

PUBLISHER: KOEI Corporation.
DEVELOPER: MicroProse Software.
GAME TYPE: World-Building Simulator, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

Based on the classic MicroProse computer game (1991), *Civilization* has you using strategy and cunning to "found a civilization and bring it to maturity." The game starts off with a single tribe settling somewhere and creating a city. As the game progresses, you, enlisting the help of advisors, scientists, and warriors, will develop agriculture (including irrigating the land), manage resources, increase the population, construct buildings, build roads and railroads, develop new technologies, form an army, compete with rivals (including Napoleon and Mao Zedong), sign peace treaties, and wage war on hostile neighbors. You will also explore new lands, build new cities, change the form of government, construct spacecraft, and much more, with the ultimate goal of settling a colony in outer space.

Floods, plagues, pollution, and other setbacks will impede your progress, and you should try to keep your citizens happy. Much of the gameplay involves making menu screen selections such as move, wait, sentry, disband, city, road, forest, and plunder. During the setup phase, you can set the number of rival states operated by the computer, select your nationality, enter your leader's name, and customize your world according to land mass, temperature, climate, and age. Difficulty levels include chieftain, warlord, prince, king, and emperor. Compatible with the Super NES Mouse. Also released for the PlayStation. Numerous sequels and offshoots followed, including *Sid Meier's Civilization: Revolution* (DS, PS3, Xbox).

Notable Quotable:

"The game is complete and everything works the way it should. Some of the menus are a little clunky, and it's not as graphically elegant as I'm used to—in fact, it's just this side of ugly—but you play this for the strategy, not the visuals. It still keeps me up nights." –*Game Players* (October 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"It was basically following after *Pirates*, which was an open-world game, and *Railroad Tycoon*, which was the first of what you could call a god game. We really saw the potential in getting away from the kind of arcadey-type games that were popular at the time. Part of our inspiration was probably also *SimCity* . . . We learned from *Railroad Tycoon* some things that were fun, but we were looking for a topic that was bigger and more epic than just railroads. So we decided on the history of civilization, which is pretty epic. And then it was finding ways to boil that down into manageable parts and create a game where the player really was in control of making the key decisions." –Sid Meier (www.pcworld.com), reflecting on twenty-five years of the original computer version of *Civilization*.

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Clay Fighter

PUBLISHER: Interplay Productions.
DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts/ Interplay Productions.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

An oddly amusing take on the genre popularized by *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat*, *Clay Fighter* dispenses with the heavy-handed nature of those games in favor of mirth and whimsy. The one-on-one, punch-and-kick fests are fought between such claymation characters as Ickybod Clay (think Ichabod Crane from *Sleepy Hollow*), who unleashes a pumpkin butt move, and Blue Suede Goo, who wields a hair blade maneuver and sounds like Elvis (thanks to some nifty digitized voice effects). Battle arenas match the theme of the characters, such as Ickybod's Haunted House and Blue Suede Goo's Trample the Ivories.

Other pliable, playable characters include: Bad Mr. Frosty (Fort Frosty arena), an attitudinal snowman who throws snowballs and spits sharp balls of ice; Blob (Blob's World), an amorphous blob who can transform into a buzz saw and other objects; Bonker (Funhouse), a clown who can throw pies, do killer cartwheels, use a deadly spraying flower, and wield a big hammer; Helga (At the Opera), an obese opera singer who does a sonic scream and hurls herself through the air, stabbing opponents with her horned helmet; Taffy (Taffy Factory), who does stretching, twisting attacks; and Tiny (Coliseum), a diaper-wearing wrestler wannabe who has big fists and can roll himself into a ball and charge at his enemies. Standard moves that all of the fighters share include a variety of light and heavy punches and kicks. A final boss called N. Boss, whose name is a take on M. Bison from *Street Fighter II* and the phrase "end boss," attacks with projectiles copied from other characters. The SNES version of *Clay Fighter* has superior sound and graphics to its Genesis counterpart.

Memories:
The *Clay Fighter* phenomenon was basically a silly (in a good way) claymation take on the ubiquitous fighting game genre perfected and popularized by *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat*. When I first played the original *Clay Fighter* during my heavy Blockbuster renting days, I was surprised at how much I enjoyed it (despite the fact that the controls weren't as tight as the games it copied, nor was the game as hard-hitting), and I continued with the series.

Notable Quotable:
"'Everybody is serious with *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter*,' says Greg Thomas, president of Marin, California-based Visual Concepts, the video game producer responsible for *Clay Fighter*. 'We wanted to add something new to the genre and make it funny.' His medium: clay. To come up with the gooey claymation characters, Thomas took his idea to stop-motion animation gurus Ken Pontac and David Bleiman of Danger Productions in Brisbane, California (which is currently developing a new, stop-motion animated Saturday morning kid's show, *Bump in the Night*, that will air on ABC television next fall). The painstaking, shape-and-shoot process of creating and animating the claysters took nearly a year. Interplay Productions joined in on the fun by splicing together certain animated sequences to create new moves,and by creating a voice-enhanced musical score and splat-happy sound effects. At Visual Concepts, programmer Jason Anderson put in a year's worth of eighteen-hour days to turn the raw clay animations into a smooth-flowing, ass-kicking-fun fighting game, which cheerfully boasts flying chunks of colorful clay instead of virtual viscera. For sure, *Clay Fighter* is gobs and gobs of good clean fun. Parents will approve and may even slap a few clay heads themselves." –*Wired* (February 1, 1994)

Insider Insight:
I'll never forget getting *Clay Fighter* for Christmas in 1993. I was seven years old, and I thought the idea of a cartoony claymation *Mortal Kombat* was pure genius. Of all the new games I received that year from Santa, it was the first one I booted up. Hearing that fully vocalized theme song on the title screen blare out of my speakers for the first time was a magical experience. Never before had I seen a video game open like a Saturday Morning cartoon! They say first impressions are everything, and while I do consider the game mediocre today, I'll always love it for the wackiness. –Tyler Esposito

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Clay Fighter 2:
Judgment Clay

PUBLISHER: Interplay Productions.
DEVELOPER: Interplay Productions.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1–8 players (2-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Also known as *C2: Judgment Clay*, *Clay Fighter 2: Judgment Clay* is a sequel to *Clay Fighter*, the humorous claymation game. The cartridge retains three of the original playable fighters (Bad Mr. Frosty, Tiny, and Blob), but replaces the others with five new characters, each with a distinctive special move. A large banana with a Jamaican accent, Nan Man throws banana slices. Octo the octopus does a spinning cartwheel attack. Goo Goo, a giant baby, does a ram butt attack. A boxing kangaroo named Kangoo unleashes dashing punches. Featured prominently on the game box, Hoppy "The Battle Bunny" fights using a spinning carrot attack.

Each of the eight characters has an evil unlockable counterpart. While they have the same sprites as the standard fighters, they have different attacks, colors, fighting stances, mugshots, win quotes, and endings. Their starting match poses are different as well. Upgrades to the familiar formula include more than twice the clay animation, faster gameplay, and a variety of new moves, including super attacks. Tournaments include Sudden Death, Single Elimination, and Double Elimination. Followed by *Clay Fighter 63 1/3* and *Clay Fighter: Sculptor's Cut* for the Nintendo 64.

Notable Quotable:
"There's a lot to like in *C2: Judgment Clay*—the colorful graphics, the combos, the voices—but there's also a lot to be desired. Why are there no throws, no holds, no distinctly different boss characters, no 'clay-talities'? A conditional recommendation for this one." *–Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"In video games, as in movies, sequels don't often improve on the originals. As much as the original *Clay Fighter* thumbed its Play-Doh nose at fighting-game conventions—the hurled projectiles, the roundhouse kicks—this sequel buys into those same conventions, making *Clay Fighter 2: Judgment Clay* closer in spirit to *Street Fighter II*. The backgrounds here are darker and less cartoony, the moves seem much more vicious, and even the addition of goony-looking combatants (including a giant banana) doesn't compensate for the feeling that the original game was much more fun." *–Entertainment Weekly* (December 2, 1994)

Schiffer Publishing

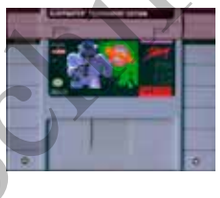
Clay Fighter:
Tournament Edition

PUBLISHER: Interplay.
DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts/ Interplay Productions.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1–8 players (2-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Boasting 24 megs of power, this Blockbuster exclusive is similar to the original *Clay Fighter*, but adds four- and eight-player tournament modes consisting of Single Elimination, Double Elimination, and Sudden Death. In addition, gameplay is faster, the graphics are a little brighter, and there are more voice effects and a new introduction. There are also some new backgrounds (such as a giant Elvis-like face in Blue Suede Goo's arena), and characters can now perform three- and four-hit combos. Unfortunately, there are no new characters. Followed by *Clay Fighter 2: Judgment Clay*.

Notable Quotable:
"This is one of the more blatant examples of a company trying to cash in twice on the same freakin' game! Besides a new intro and some minor tweaks in the gameplay, this is exactly the same as the first *Clay Fighter* game! There aren't even any new characters! Pass!" –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:
"*CFTE* has a lot of new features that should attract first-time buyers of the game, and if you're a *Clay* fanatic, you'll want both to grace your shelves. If you're not that gooey about Clay Fighting, however, then this one doesn't really justify having both. Although there are some great new features, they really should've been included in the first game." –*GamePro* (July 1994)



Insider Insight:
Like many Nintendo fans, one of my most cherished dreams was to compete in a professional gaming competition. Blame it on the movie *The Wizard*, I suppose. In 1994, opportunity came knocking in the guise of the Blockbuster Video World Game Championship. Local Blockbuster rental stores hosted a video game competition on the two ubiquitous 16-bit consoles of the early '90s: the Sega Genesis and the Super Nintendo.

Competitors were presented with three titles to play on their system of choice, with the goal of achieving the highest combined score. The SNES titles were *NBA Jam*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Tournament Fighters*, and *Clay Fighter: Tournament Edition*. While the inclusion of *NBA Jam* made sense, it seemed odd that the other two titles were lesser-known fighting games—in particular, the quirky tournament edition of *Clay Fighter*.

The original *Clay Fighter* deserves praise for injecting humor and a unique take on a genre that had become saturated with knock-offs and derivatives. The use of clay models and stop-motion animation was an innovative approach to graphics that made for incredible-looking promotional photos. Sadly, the low frame rate and weak gameplay mechanics prevented the game from being much more than a novelty, despite spawning sequels.

My entire competitive strategy in *Clay Fighter: Tournament Edition* involved spamming Ickybod Clay's dash attack against the opponent and hoping for the best.

And it worked.

I won the tournament at the store level and attended the regional finals in Ft. Lauderdale, only to be defeated onstage in a head-to-head game of *NBA Jam* against another competitor. While I didn't win in *NBA Jam* that day, I did become great friends with another SNES store champion. Over the next few years, he and I played hundreds of matches in topnotch, head-to-head fighting games on the Super Nintendo. Oddly enough, *Clay Fighter: Tournament Edition* was not one of them. –Jon D. Harrison

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Claymates

PUBLISHER: Interplay Productions.
DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts/ Danger Productions.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Professor Putty has developed a serum that turns living creatures into clay. Jobo, a mad witch doctor claiming sole authority over the power of clay, angrily watches these developments. In a jealous rage, Jobo seizes Professor Putty and turns his son Clayton into a ball of clay. Now Clayton must rescue his father and retrieve the serum that will turn him back into a boy. To help him on his way, Clayton, a rolling ball of clay who punches enemies, can pick up pieces of clay that will turn him into one of several animals with special abilities: an arrogant cat named Muckster (climbs trees, swipes paws at enemies), a mouse named Oozy (runs super-fast, roars at enemies), a fish called Goopy (swims, spits air bubbles), Globmeister the Gopher (digs, throws acorns), or Doh-Doh the Bird (flies, pecks).

Clayton can also use special objects, including eyes that reveal hidden objects, balloons that carry him into the sky, potions that give him temporary invisibility, hammers that freeze the enemies, and twisters that whisk away everything in sight. In addition, Clayton can jump on, move, and push objects that will let him access hidden areas. Along with the various spikes, Venus Clay Traps, homing mines, bad bricks, and other lethal objects Clayton must avoid, he'll face such enemies as Clay Nosed Sharks, Samurai, sumo wrestlers, weasels, Spitting Claymeleons, and Claymodo Dragons. Each of the game's levels (Clayton's backyard, the Pacific, Japan, Africa, and outer space) begins with a map screen in which you must guide a couple of robots to clear a path to the level entrance. If you finish a level with one hundred or more crystals, you get to play a bonus round.

The controls could use some fine tuning, and the map screen is a waste of time, but the characters you control are diverse, the graphics and sound are super cute, and a technology called "Blaze Processing" (a reference to Sega's "Blast Processing") sometimes lets you move at Sonic the Hedgehog-like speeds. The levels, in fact, are similar to those found in *Sonic the Hedgehog* but aren't designed as well, as they rarely take good, consistent advantage of the animals' special abilities. *Claymates* is an offshoot of the Clay Fighter series, but it didn't spawn any sequels.

Notable Quotable:

"The best SNES game I did was called *Claymates*, and it won some awards, but unfortunately EA's decision to name it killed it. That was not the name we wanted, and *Claymates* sounded idiotic, so it flopped." –*Claymates* designer Brian Greenstone (www.rvgfanatic.com)

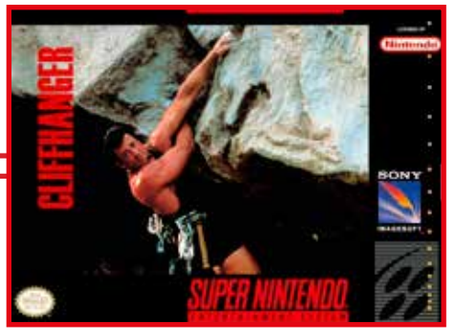
Notable Quotable:

"*Claymates* controls fairly well, though it does feel a bit heavy. You have a tad too much momentum, and it can be difficult to land on very precise platforms, but other than that it's mechanically adequate . . . solid mechanics only go so far as the levels they are used in . . . it is truly amazing how many design flaws are present here . . . The camera's a little bit too close, and you can't really see too far in the distance . . . the pace of *Claymates* is so fast . . . incredibly difficult to react to things that come in from offscreen . . . the levels in *Claymates* are not built around the speed you can reach . . . even though the graphics and animation look great, the levels kill any chance of fun you might have had. It takes far too long to beat in one sitting, and there's no way to save it. Levels are massive, seemingly to encourage exploration, but there's nothing worth finding—the only real goal is to get to the end." –Crispy Pixel (YouTube)

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Cliffhanger

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Malibu Interactive.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.



A dreadful (if rather faithfully adapted) take on the 1993 feature film, *Cliffhanger* puts players in the Sylvester Stallone role of Gabe Walker, a mountain rescue specialist who must work his way through seven mountainous levels: The Escape from Qualen; In Search of the Second Base; On to Douglas Cabin—And Jessie; Qualen Cops a Chopper—And Grabs Jessie!; The Climb to the Top of the Bitker Ladder; All that Money, Lost!; and Face to Face with Qualen.

There are bridges to cross, steep cliffs to climb (while being shot at), floating logs to jump on, and chasms to rope-walk over. One particularly harrowing (not to mention frustrating) stage has players running down a mountain, dodging rocks, and jumping over fallen trees while trying to stay ahead of an avalanche. To battle the bad guys he'll encounter, Qualen can punch (jab, left hook, right hook, uppercut), kick (including flying kicks and super kicks), and use guns and knives. Walker can also duck and block. The combat sections of *Cliffhanger* play like a poor man's *Streets of Rage*. Prior to confronting the evil Eric Qualen, players must battle a number of other end-of-level bosses.

The near-identical Genesis version is faster and has trickier platforming but easier enemy battles. The Sega CD rendition is augmented with snowboarding levels, CD-quality music (including select cuts from the movie soundtrack), and twenty minutes of digitized film clips. *Cliffhanger* was also adapted (in varying forms) for the Game Boy, Game Gear, and NES.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are passable. The sprites are small but nice and their animation is decent. The problem is that there is not much variety in the enemies. The backgrounds are decent as well, but there is virtually no variety . . . Between the levels there are some 'digitized' stills from the film (redrawn, actually) that are amongst the worst I have ever seen. Poor Sly never looked uglier . . . the music is very boring and repetitive, and the sound effects are bad . . . the control is unresponsive. The collision detection is also poor . . . Try it if you are a fan of the film. The rest of you better play *Final Fight* again." –The Video Game Museum (www.vgmuseum.com)

Insider Insight:

Oh, this game. Oftentimes, back in the old days, my friends and I would rent a game in hopes of beating it over the weekend. When the pickings were slim, we would just choose whatever ones we hadn't beaten yet. One fateful week we had the misfortune of picking up *Cliffhanger*, and we regretted that decision for years to come. Things were going well enough when it was just a regular brawler, but then we got to the avalanche levels—for the love of Stallone those things were nearly impossible. So week after week we would keep renting it, sometimes for Genesis, sometimes for SNES, and each time we got a little farther.

After what felt like an eternity of mastering this abominable snow game, we finally hit a wall at what we thought at the time was the final boss, which if you don't already know is a fistfight with a helicopter. Go ahead and let that sink in. To this day none of us have taken down *Cliffhanger*, though I later learned that after you beat up the helicopter you then have to fight a surprisingly nimble John Lithgow, so I can't imagine I'll ever see those end-credits roll for myself. I'd like to say we all had fun, but no. It's certainly memorable, though. –Kris Randazzo

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Clue

PUBLISHER: Parker Brothers.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Board Game, 2–6 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

Just like the classic board game on which it is based, *Clue* for the Super Nintendo lets up to six aspiring sleuths try and solve the mystery of who murdered Mr. Boddy, owner of Boddy Mansion. Players, as suspect Colonel Mustard, Mrs. Peacock, Professor Plum, Miss Scarlet, Mr. Green, or Mrs. White, must uncover whodunit, where it was done (hall, lounge, dining room, kitchen, ballroom, conservatory, billiard room, library, or study), and with what weapon (knife, candlestick, revolver, rope, lead pipe, or wrench). This is achieved by rolling dice (with a digitized human hand), moving a piece around a game board (which is viewed from overhead), exploring Boddy Mansion, suggesting who committed the crime and with what, conducting interrogations, and making an accusation. It is recommended that players write down what they learn in their detective notepad.

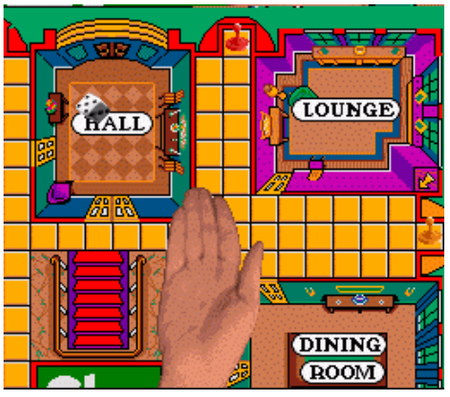
Five difficulty levels are available: amateur, gumshoe, sleuth, P.I., and detective. Harder levels have more negative clues, such as "Mr. Green was not in the lounge." While the video game version of *Clue* does an excellent job of emulating the original board game (the music even evokes the 1985 feature film), it is awkward to have the other players look away from the screen while one player looks at his or her cards. Also released for the Genesis. The CD-i version is a full-motion video adaptation of the board game.

Notable Quotable:

"At the time of its release, it was the most expensive way to play *Clue*, which has always been my beef with video game adaptations of board games. Of course, it's a lot cheaper now . . . even though it's a decent game, the board game is much more enjoyable . . . My personal favorite [version of the board game] is the *Master Detective* edition . . . it's greatly expanded with more rooms, weapons, and suspects, so if you get a big enough group together, you can have a ten-player game." –AqualungGameReviews (YouTube)

Insider Insight:
When I was a kid, we only had a small stack of board games. Of those, *Clue* was always a favorite among me and my siblings. We practiced the art of murder periodically, and when the *Clue VCR Mystery Game* was released by Parker Brothers in 1985, I lusted after it like crazy. The trouble was we didn't have a VCR. In fact, I think I was the last kid on the planet to get one. Come 1992, our family still didn't have a VCR, but I had an SNES. So when *Clue* dropped on the system that September, I was calling the local Babbage's Software store daily until it arrived.

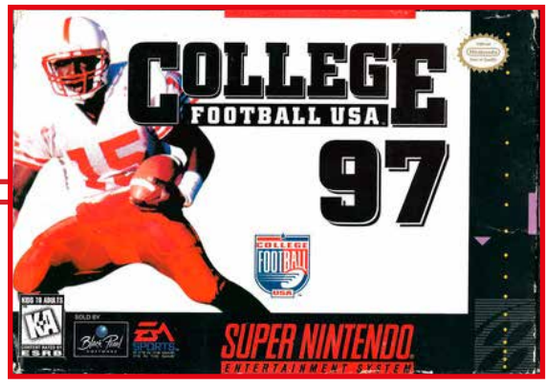
In the back of my head I had been secretly hoping that it would play like the VHS game. Nintendo's newest game machine was released years after VHS popped on the scene, so the SNES version of *Clue* must be superior, I convinced myself. Of course, they were totally different types of games. Despite the fact that the Super Nintendo played a fine version of the traditional game, I felt disappointed—almost as if Miss Scarlett had sunk her dagger in my back herself. In the conservatory, of course! –Michael Thomasson



Schiffer Publishing, LTD

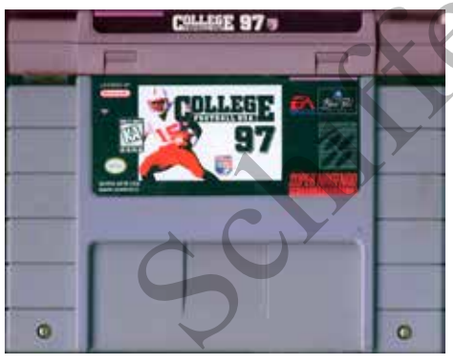
College Football USA 97:
The Road to New Orleans

PUBLISHER: Black Pearl Software.
DEVELOPER: Ceris Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1996.



The Road to New Orleans looks and plays a lot like the previous game, *College Football USA 96* for the Genesis, but adds a few additions to the formula. Gamers can now create and save up to twenty-eight players, customizing each created player's name, number, position, weight, awareness, range, injury resistance, and speed. Customization is also a factor in schedules as players can now select the schools they want to play against. There are 111 Division 1A teams. Eight different conferences are represented: ACC, Big 12, Big East, SEC, WAC, Big 10, Conference USA, and PAC 10, each with its own style of play.

Armchair athletes can play all their games at home, if they so choose, or go the more traditional route with some away games on the schedule. A few new animations have been added, along with a Tie Breaker mode in which the coin toss winner automatically starts on the 25-yard line. If that team fails to get a first down, the other squad gets the ball at the same field position until either team scores. Players can compete in the Nokia Sugar Bowl, the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl, the FedEx Orange Bowl, or the Rose Bowl. In addition to bowl and university licensing, the game features a USA Today/CNN Coach's Poll and a Sears National Championship. Also released for the Genesis.



Notable Quotable:

"With its fumbling combination of atrocious gameplay and choppy graphics, *College Football USA 97* wins the title of 'Worst Sports Game of the Year.' The only strong point here is the selection of 111 teams, including everyone from Florida to Fresno State. Other than that, the game's a complete gridiron debacle. Players fly around the field—except for the man with the ball, whose movements slow down and become jerky. The frame rate and animation are poor (the players look armless), and the sound features the most obnoxious whistle in sports gaming history. With a game this bad, it's no wonder Bill Walsh took his name off this series and went back to advising the pros." –*GamePro* (March 1997)

Scitter Publishing

College Slam

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Iguana UK.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball, 1–16 players (4-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1996.

College Slam is essentially *NBA Jam T.E.* (complete with hot spots and power-ups), but features top college teams instead of pros. There are forty-four squads in all, including such powerhouses as the Indiana Hoosiers, Kansas Jayhawks, Kentucky Wildcats, and North Carolina Tar Heels. Players are rated according to speed, three-pointers, power, stealing, passing, dunking, blocking, clutch play, and injury status, but names and stats can be customized, meaning you can add real player names.

NBA Jam veterans will be (overly) familiar with the two-on-two gameplay, the high-flying dunks, and the turbo-charged action. However, the game does offer some new elements, including turning players invisible or into tornados. Modes of play include Head to Head, Semi Finals, Tournament, and Season. The SNES version of *College Slam* has brighter coloring than its Genesis counterpart.

Notable Quotable:

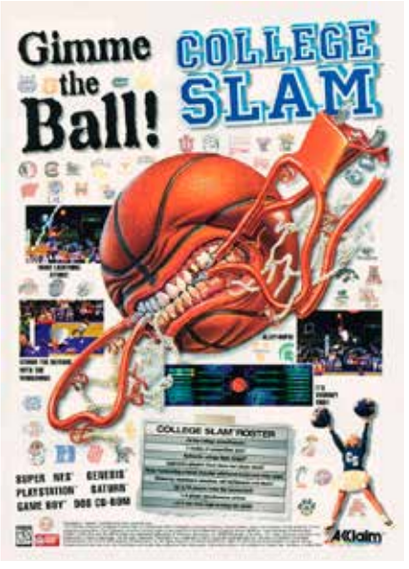
"Graphically, everything here's on par with the other two SNES NBA Jam games. Players are still faceless, with dots for eyes, and uniforms are still the same two-color palette swaps, but if it wasn't a problem for you before, it shouldn't be now. Same story with sound, for the most part, with commentary once again handled by The Voice of God himself, Tim Kitzrow, although here his lines feel a bit more subdued than on *Jam*; there's no 'BOOMSHAKALAKA!' to be found, but I gotta admit, throwing down a put-back dunk and having Kitzrow respond with 'Keg Party!' was more than a little funny. All the sound effects are overblown, keeping with the spirit of the games, as dunks sound like explosions and the ball bouncing off the rim sounds a lot more like dropping a brick on a concrete floor.

"On the surface, *College Slam* seems like a cheap knockoff of *NBA Jam* designed for a very niche audience, but if you give it a chance, it's not a bad game on its own merits. The ability to edit teams and make in-game substitutions add a layer of strategy amongst the mayhem, and the intensity that college basketball rivalries bring to the table make it a bit more logical to make an extreme college hoops game. It's not the be-all, end-all game in the genre by any stretch, but it could be a raucous good time with some friends, especially if you're on two different sides of a basketball blood feud, and no matter how old or derivative a game is, it's always enjoyable to be able to throw down a cross-court helicopter jam on Duke." –Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Insider Insight:

College Slam, in my experience, was initially one of the bigger disappointments on the SNES. I remember my brother Reid bringing it home one day my senior year of high school, and the box cover—a teeth-baring basketball fiercely chomping on the basket—surely seemed to promise some incredible video hoops within. But the game itself turned out to be essentially an *NBA Jam* clone, only without *NBA Jam*'s personality. Sure, it was fun enough to play as the Division I college squads, but the players weren't actually named, which almost made the team designations a moot point. Suffice to say, at our house we didn't end up playing *College Slam* for long—it was back to *NBA Jam* pretty quickly.

At some point afterward, the game disappeared from our collection; I figure one of my brothers probably traded or gave it away. But many years later, after rediscovering the SNES at our parents' house and again playing *NBA Jam* (and loving it), I thought it might be worth revisiting its collegiate spinoff. One eBay transaction later, that same net-chomping basketball cover sat on my kitchen counter, and I fired up the game for the first time in two decades. The verdict? It's still no *NBA Jam*. But considered of its own accord, it's actually some enjoyable basketball. This time I plan on keeping it. –Shane Stein



Schiffer Publishing, LTD

The Combatribes

PUBLISHER: American Technos.
DEVELOPER: Technos Japan.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

The Combatribes for the SNES is a story-enhanced port of the arcade game of the same name. It also adds a one-on-one versus mode like that found in the NES version of *Double Dragon*. However, it is missing a few features, such as a three-player mode, the tower section of level two, and the ability for you to pick up and use weapons. In a futuristic New York City, players walk, punch, and kick their way through six levels: The Motorcycle Nuclear Warheads (the streets of New York), The Demon Clowns (Coney Island), The Slash Skate Screamers (a disco), The Stadium Barbarians (behind the seats of a baseball diamond), The Slaughter Troops (inside a building), and The Final Battle (against a blonde cyborg named Martha Splatterhead).

Each level scrolls a short distance but is essentially a single area, making it less adventurous-feeling than such similar (not to mention superior) games as *Final Fight* and *Streets of Rage*. You play as one of three cyborgs ("vigilantes" in the arcade version): Berserker, a spikey-haired blond brawler offering an equal mix of speed and strength; Bullova, a slow but strong African-American; and Blitz, who's relatively weak but fast and capable of jump-kicks. There are other moves as well, such as a running attack, a flying throw, a back breaker, and a pavement kiss, the last of which lets you slam your opponent's head against the ground.

Fun Fact:
When *The Combatribes* hit the Wii Virtual Console in North America in 2009, the enemy organization "Ground Zero" was renamed "Guilty Zero," probably because of the terrorist attacks of 9-11.

Notable Quotable:
"Technos truly was the king of the brawler genre in the 8-bit era, as it's indisputable that some of the company's efforts from that age have gone on to become true classics—*Double Dragon* and *River City Ransom* chief among them. This attempt by the developer to transition its success into the SNES age just fell flat, though, as Capcom's *Final Fight* and Sega's *Streets of Rage* became the new flagships for the beat-'em-up genre moving into the '90s." –Lucas M. Thomas (www.ign.com)

Schiffer Publishing Ltd.

Congo's Caper

PUBLISHER: Data East.
DEVELOPER: DE Act Team.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1993.

This colorful and fun platformer, which is the SNES exclusive sequel to *Joe & Mac*, puts players in the title role of Congo, a monkey that was turned into a half-human by a magic ruby that fell from the sky. To rescue his girlfriend, Congette, he must traverse thirty-five different levels spread across six multi-stage areas: Valley, Water, Speeding, Ghost & Ghouls, Modern Technology, and Final Kingdom. Environments include jungles, ghost towns, pirate ships, a ninja castle, and more.

To defeat the cavemen, dinosaurs, pirates, and other enemies he'll come across, Congo can bop them with a club, which can also be used to break through natural barriers like rock. In addition, Congo can roll up and down hills and do a rolling attack, which helps give certain areas of the game a *Sonic the Hedgehog*-type feel. Congo jumps very high, and he can duck, climb ladders, swim, swing on vines, bounce and dive on enemies, do a sliding attack, ride a Pteranodon (to bonus stages), and discover secret rooms and hidden areas.

If he gets hit, Congo will revert to his monkey form. If he gets hit while he's a monkey, he'll lose a life. If he picks up a ruby, he can turn back into a half-human or briefly turn into invincible Super Congo if he gets the ruby while he's already half-human. Collecting one hundred diamonds or one big diamond scores an extra life, while collecting sapphires spins a slot machine at the top of the screen.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics in *Congo's Caper* are decent. They're colorful and help convey a warm and fun mood. The sound and music are alright—nothing terrible, but I've certainly heard better. The controls are good . . . I never found myself being frustrated with them in any way . . . The game itself is rather easy. You can rack up one-ups with ease . . . there are some annoyingly difficult parts, but on the whole this game is fair, and it's a fun, quick little play-through . . . You can complete this game in under an hour." –Bits & Glory (bitsandglory.com)

Insider Insight:

During the heyday of the Super Nintendo, I purposely passed up *Congo's Caper* several times, assuming that it was another *Joe & Mac* rehash. After all, it was developed by the same company. One weekend during the late '90s, while I was searching for hidden gems at the Buffalo Super Flea, I traded in some games for a copy of *Xardion*, a platform shooter for the SNES. And, since I couldn't find anything else worth getting to use up my remaining credit, I reluctantly grabbed a copy of *Congo's Caper*.

When I got home later that day, I eagerly popped in *Xardion*, knowing full well that it was going to be the better of the two games. Unfortunately, like many others who have played *Xardion*, I discovered what a dud that was after just a few minutes of play. Thus, I was basically forced to check out *Congo's Caper* if I wanted to salvage my day at the flea market.

What happened next was a valuable life lesson that has stuck with me since: do not judge a game by its cover, or by two or three screenshots on the back of the box. *Congo's Caper* turned out to be a refreshingly fun game and, much to my surprise, was more enjoyable than *Joe & Mac*. It was quirky and had catchy music, the levels where the perfect size, and, with the *Super Mario World*-inspired overhead mapping system, you really felt like you were progressing through each level.

Boss battles were at times too easy, and then at times too hard, but once I realized that you could farm jewels to get extra lives, and you could basically farm all the free lives you want, that made the game much easier. However, this method only worked if you wanted to put in the time to slow down the pace of zipping through the levels in order to farm said gems. There are probably hidden gems in the game I still haven't found!

Over the past few years, I've introduced my son to many of the video games that helped shape my passion for the hobby. Together, we've finished numerous titles for the NES and SNES. As we make our way through my cartridge collection, I look forward to playing through *Congo's Caper* once more. It's definitely one of the better hidden gems for the console. –Russ Kumro

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Contra III: *The Alien Wars*

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

The Contra series, which began in the arcades in 1987, and gained fame on the NES in 1988, continued with this 16-bit masterpiece for the Super NES. Much of the blast-a-thon action is of the standard side-scrolling platform variety, but two of the six levels incorporate a surprisingly effective overhead view featuring super cool Mode 7 effects. Levels, which are called missions, include: The Streets of Neo City, Maria Calderon Highway, The Old Cyber Steel Mill, The Battle of the Blazing Sky (airborne platforming where you'll ride jet motorcycles and helicopter missiles), The Mucho Grande Badlands, and Red Falcon's Main Base.

Contra III never lets up. As you run, jump, and shoot for your life (you can also climb and grip walls, girders, and ceilings), you'll be bombarded with all sorts of aliens. Strange creatures such as Twylobite, Vicious Slave Hawk, Robo-Corpse, Tri-Transforming Wall Walker, and Para-Slug join forces with Snipers, Man-Faced Mutted, Corporals of Punishment, Mutant Megasquitos, and Psycho Cyclers to make the game dangerously exciting every step of the way. Spouts of fire and other obstacles add to the fun and challenge.

You begin the game armed with a standard-issue rifle that can shoot up, down, and diagonally. To release power-ups, you can shoot down weapon wings that fly by. Said power-ups include homing gun (bullets follow enemies), barrier shield, crush gun, laser gun, fire gun, spread gun (one of the greatest weapons in all of gaming), and M-80,000 helio bombs, which vaporize all onscreen enemies. You can carry two weapons at once and switch between them. You'll also commandeer motorcycles and tanks.

Contra III could benefit from a few more levels, and slowdown occurs from time to time; however, giant bosses, constant shooting action, intense gameplay, huge explosions, rich graphics, death-defying acrobatics, a vibrant musical score, and richly detailed, post-apocalypse graphics make these shortcomings easy to ignore. The follow-up to *Super C* for the NES, *Contra III* was released in Japan as *Contra Spirits* and in the PAL region as *Super Probotector: Alien Rebels*. Released the same year as *Contra Force* for the NES and the year after *Operation C* for the Game Boy. Followed by *Contra: Hard Corps* (Genesis), *Contra: Shattered Soldier* (PS2), *Contra IV* (DS), and other sequels and offshoots.

Offer Publishing, LLC

Insider Insight:
Designing and programing bosses has always been one of my favorite aspects of creating games. I'm a huge fan of action titles with unique bosses in a constrained playing environment—all the games in the Contra series delivered in this area. I knew when *Contra III* came out that it was going to be a must-own. I saw screenshots of some of the bosses way before it was released and thought, "I can't wait to play this and get to those bosses!"

I remember waiting and waiting for our local game store to get their shipment of *Contra III*. When I finally saw the box on the shelf, I held it in my hands, turned the box around, and looked at some of the gameplay action and a good-sized boss to battle—I couldn't wait to get home and tear off the shrink-wrap and play the heck out of the game!

To bring back memories, I recently plugged *Contra III* into the SNES, and the first thing I remembered is that I shouldn't drink coffee while playing because it's so intense it is the equivalent of drinking three cups—you almost can't blink or you'll die!

Contra III has a two-weapon slot system, allowing you to store up to two weapons that could be the same or different from each other and giving the game a little strategy. The default weapon is a basic pea shooter in both slots. You fill these slots with weapons that appear via power-ups that you shoot down and collect. It's always important to have the right weapons in the correct slots when going up against certain bosses.

One of my favorite levels features what I call the "Spinning Spider" boss. I love rotating the road that leads up to this boss as you battle small baddies; if you got through all of them your reward is a cool giant spider boss with a top-down view that rotates right and left. The homing missile weapon is great to use while rotating your character around and trying to shoot the red target on this wacky spider.

Contra III's design was, and still is, very inspiring to me. So now I must go and play it for the next few weeks—with some coffee! –Steve Woita

Insider Insight:
I've been a fan of the Contra series since first playing the NES game in 1988, and, as you might expect, *Contra III: The Alien Wars* was at the top of my most-wanted list when April of 1992 rolled around. My best friend Chris got it as soon as it came out, and we spent all our free time playing it. For months I knew it would be one of the first games I bought when I finally got my own Super Nintendo.

My SNES arrived as a graduation gift that year, along with enough money to buy two games. I located *Super Castlevania IV* quickly enough, but the local Electronics Boutique was the only store that had any copies of *Contra III* in stock—and they only had one left. It was on a shelf above the display boxes, and as the EB employee reached up and grabbed it, to my horror, it slipped out of his hands and hit the floor with a resounding crunch.

I was aghast. That was the only copy they had! What if it was broken? The employee picked it up and told me it should be fine, but to bring it back if it didn't work, and they'd exchange it for a new copy whenever they got one in.

Whenever? The trip home that day was suspenseful. Would it still work, or would I have to wait until who-knew-when to get another copy? I held my breath as I finally inserted the game into my SNES and turned on the power. I let out a huge sigh of relief as the Konami logo appeared, and shortly afterwards I was happily blasting aliens into oblivion. Even now, there's still a mark on the box from where it hit the floor, and whenever I see it, I remember that day. –Rob Strangman

Insider Insight:
Being a huge fan of the original NES *Contra*, I knew I had to have *Contra III: The Alien Wars* at launch!

I drooled over the Japanese import screenshots showing up in both *EGM* and *VG&CE* magazine. So by the time April '92 came around, I already had the money set aside for it. After plugging in the cartridge, I was greeted by some great-sounding music and a short intro. I recall being REALLY impressed by the first stage! It looked better than many other SNES games at the time. Hell, even after owning a Neo Geo AES for more than a year, this game still impressed me! The use of rich, vibrant colors, huge bosses, and exuberant usage of Mode 7 was simply fantastic. Who could forget when the fighter jet comes roaring out from the background while shooting missiles toward you?

While some of Konami's earlier SNES attempts saw severe slowdown (another game with the Roman numeral "III" comes to mind!), *Contra III* ran mostly great! It was clear they had mastered the 16-bit system architecture with this one.

I also enjoyed the mixture of overhead stages along with tried-and-true side-scrolling fare. It helped give the game a nice pace as well as variety. I really liked the ability to collect and switch between two weapons at any time. With two weapons collected, you could also hold L and R together for no other reason but to look like a boss in your John Rambo pose! Almost everyone I knew would always do that at the part when the plane flies out towards you—It was mandatory in our home.

Contra III is not as hard as many people seem to think. As with the first *Contra*, the more you practice, the easier it gets. It is most definitely a game where finesse and timing will get you through to the end, and as with any great *Contra* game, that's where you will inevitably "GET TO THE CHOPPA!" –Matt Henzel

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Cool Spot

PUBLISHER: Virgin Games.
DEVELOPER: Virgin Games.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

A stylish, nicely animated platformer with colorful, richly detailed graphics, *Cool Spot* stars the round, shades-wearing 7UP mascot, who can run, jump (some of the platform jumping is very tricky), climb, flip, turn somersaults, float on balloons, and ride in bubbles. He can also throw "cool shot" bubbles at such enemies as dragonflies, cowboys, robots, soldiers, spiders, sand crabs, bouncing slime balls, chattering wind-up teeth, UFOs, dive-bombing bees, water-spitting frogs, egg-dropping birds, and cheese-throwing mice. Cool Spot's job is to collect cool points (red spinning discs) and 7UP, and to rescue his friends, all of whom are called "Spot."

The game takes players through eleven wild and wacky (the manual calls them "cool and crazy") levels: Shell Shock, Pier Pressure, In Da Wall, Toying Around, Wading Around, Loco Motive, Radical Rails, Wound Up, Back to the Wall, Dock & Roll, and Surf Patrol, each filled with fun, variety, and such obstacles and features as barbed wire, vacuum tubes, and hidden passageways. There are bonus levels as well, where you'll use bubbles to travel up the inside of a 7UP bottle. Tunes by famed game music composer Tommy Tallarico only add to the enjoyment.

The original Genesis version of *Cool Spot* is even better, thanks to faster, tighter gameplay, and a bigger playfield (the SNES version has larger borders at the top and bottom), though the SNES game does have superior graphics and sounds. Also released for the Game Boy and Game Gear. Followed by *Spot Goes to Hollywood* (Genesis, PlayStation, Saturn). The title character also appeared in *Spot: The Video Game!* (NES, Game Boy) and *Spot: The Cool Adventure* (Game Boy).

Notable Quotable:

"Spot's 250 fluid animations ensure his place as the slickest, grooviest character of the moment . . . the only errors I can see are the precision needed to jump certain platforms compared to the ease of the rest. Spot moves pretty fast, especially in the air, and on levels like the yellow submarine and the train where you go high enough to scroll upward so the platform you're aiming for isn't visible for most of the leap, it's maddeningly tricky at times and laughably easy at others. A niggling complaint, but so many of these sections prevent *Cool Spot* from being an all-time classic." –*SNES Force* (December 1993)

Insider Insight:
Ah, the good old days, when it was viable for brands to cash in with video game tie-ins for just about anything. *Cool Spot* was a little different, though. While it was a platformer based on the popular (at the time at least) 7UP character Cool Spot, it had some legit game-making talent behind it. Developed by Virgin Games in its heyday, *Cool Spot* was programmed by David Perry (the Genesis version, anyway—Mark Kelly programmed the SNES game), also known at the time for Disney's *Aladdin* (the Genesis game, not the Capcom-developed SNES one) and *Earthworm Jim*. Tommy Tallarico, who was making a name for himself at the time for utilizing digitized audio samples for higher quality soundtracks (and later went on to create the video game orchestral music sensation *Video Games Live*), handled the score. These guys were the industry darlings at the time, and their pioneering use of richer animation and audio helped elevate games to a new class. –Sam Kennedy

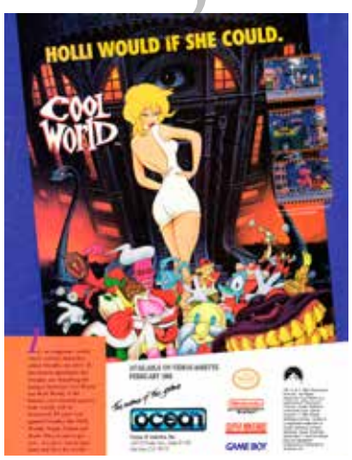
Schiffer Publishing LTD

Cool World

PUBLISHER: Ocean.
DEVELOPER: Painting by Numbers.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Based on the Ralph Bakshi live action/animated film (1992), *Cool World* has players guiding cartoonist Jack Deebs (played by Gabriel Byrne in the movie) through eight short levels: Cool World, Driving Section, Sweet Palace, Driving Section Part 2, Holli's Building, Las Vegas, Ocean Hotel, and Ocean Hotel's Rooftop. His mission is to retrieve the Golden Spike of power (the wedge between Cool World and our world), which is hidden atop Ocean Hotel. This will prevent the beautiful Doodle (cartoon character) Holli Would, who longs to be human, from inadvertently destroying the world.

To punch enemies and pull himself up to high areas, Deebs can extend his arm really far. He also jumps on enemies (including bunnies), sucks Doodles into his pen, collects nickels, climbs buildings while avoiding windows that suddenly open, gathers candies, serves milkshakes to "cuties," and more. The driving areas are vertical platforming action in a car—you speed up, slow down, jump over gaps, and dodge boxes and other obstacles. Jack has a realistic look while much of the game is cartoonish, similar to the film.



Memories:
I've been a Ralph Bakshi fan since I first saw *Wizards* (1977) at the Forum 303 midnight movies in Arlington, Texas in 1983, when I was sixteen years old. I was blown away by the color, the fantasy/war themes, and the rotoscoped animation. After that, I sought out his other films, including 1973's *Heavy Traffic* (which has some cool, up-close pinball footage), 1978's *The Lord of the Rings* (the animated version, of course), and 1983's *Fire and Ice* (co-produced by legendary artist Frank Frazetta). I saw *Cool World* new in theaters and enjoyed it to some degree (largely due to the hot Holli Would character, voiced by Kim Basinger), but was disappointed by the muddled storyline. I was even more disappointed with the video game.

Notable Quotable:
"This game is nothing more than one drawn-out fetch quest . . . needlessly difficult. There are limited amounts of nickels and candy pieces and several ways to lose them; whether spending them to repeat a failed task like carrying a soda, having them stolen from you, or being forced to pay bail with them when the policemen slow Jack down and arrest him . . . Enemies abound that can kill Jack before the player even knows it, and the sloppy controls hardly give Jack a chance; he turns slowly, he has a poor jump arc, and any sort of hit will send him reeling backwards . . . For a game populated with cartoon characters, it looks positively dreary; the humans (Noids) are made of muddy pixels, the cartoons (Doodles) are flat and nondescript, and the flashing lights of Vegas—the only interesting visual anywhere—counter-intuitively make real life look more vibrant and interesting than the darned cartoon world. The music is too dull to merit description, however much harp and electric organ it contains." –SNES HUB (playingwithsuperpower.com)

Insider Insight:
I discovered *Cool World* in the British magazine *Game Zone*, where they awarded it a shockingly low score. (I'd never even heard of the film until then.) The magazine is long gone, and my memory is faded, but it was around fourteen percent or so—at the time the lowest score I'd ever seen in a magazine! Obviously, I did not buy the game, though the screenshots showed it to be colorful and detailed. Many years later, when loose SNES cartridges were heavily discounted to clear stock, it caught my attention as being "that super awful game with the lowest score I'd seen." Worth a go I reckoned, just to see how bad it was; certainly it could be no worse than *Rise of the Robots*.

I paid my couple of quid and, much to my surprise, discovered that the game wasn't that bad. Actually, it was kinda good! It was also really difficult, and I realized from the screenshots that the reviewer hadn't gotten much beyond the first area. The more I played, the more I discovered that it was a surprisingly fun hybrid of action-platformer, in the Mario style, and classic comedic adventures, like *Maniac Mansion* and *The Secret of Monkey Island*. It wasn't as good as those, but the sheer fact they'd managed (mostly) to pull it off, despite some flaws, was an achievement in itself

Years later I spoke with lead programmer Chris Kerry, who was also lead programmer and project manager for *Jurassic Park* on SNES, and he described how the film studio's producer caused real problems during *Cool World*'s development. While this resulted in something of a curate's egg, it reinforced my belief that you can't always trust reviewers, and it made me wonder: how many other interesting games had I avoided over the years? –John Szczepaniak

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Cutthroat Island

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Software Creations.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1996.

Based on the 1995 box office bomb of the same name, which starred Mathew Modine and Geena Davis, *Cutthroat Island* lets gamers play as either sword-wielding William Shaw (Modine) or rapier-toting Morgan Adams (Davis). On a quest to uncover a treasure trove of priceless gems and gold bullion, players battle their way through ten short levels (including a prison, a pirate ship, the jungle, dark caverns, and a tavern), hacking, slashing, jabbing, and punching such enemies as redcoats, jungle creatures, chain-carrying rogues, and, of course, pirates. Prior to getting started, a selection screen lets players choose Swordplay mode or Brawling mode, the latter of which pointlessly (so to speak) disallows players the use of the sword's blade (the butt is employed to punch enemies).

As the game progresses, players acquire new weapons (knives, guns, bottles, torches, and the like) and special moves, such as a bidirectional stab and a spinning slice. Giving the game some variety are a runaway horse-drawn carriage level and a quarry cart stage, the latter of which has players fleeing prison guards. Two-player action is cooperative. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"Unlike many of the more obscure games I speed-run, I never played this as a child. I had known about the movie this game was based on and how it lost even more money than *Waterworld*, and when I saw a copy at an Exchange for a few bucks I jumped right on it. I randomly played it on Team Spooky's stream, people enjoyed my failure to get past stage two, and my interest picked up from there . . . a beat-'em-up which throws in auto-scrollers and platforming levels, as well as a mazelike level . . . I found myself getting fed up with the beat-'em-up stages . . . Grab attacks are slow and not damaging enough, and all of your 'special' moves are worthless, reducing the game's combat to either mashing out slash combos or spamming crouch stabs . . . the platforming levels turned out to have a lot more neat tricks than I expected, and I think they make this run a pretty good watch." –Josh "Funkdoc" Ballard (speeddemosarchive.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The story is the most generic pirate tale in history . . . At its core, the game is a standard brawler . . . fighting engine isn't that bad . . . Morgan and Shaw move through simple 2D levels while various pirate types saunter onto screen and throw down . . . The most interesting feature is how you unlock new moves as you progress through the story. Mashing button combos together will eventually let you spin-out a 360-degree attack or stab two swords in opposite directions. Unfortunately, these are the only two new moves you learn, taking most of the impact out of this system altogether . . . Your jumps aren't powerful enough, and the pixel-precision required for a safe landing is far more difficult than it should be. Forward jump distance is preset, and you cannot control or shorten your jump once in the air. This means you'll need to measure out your jump ahead of time, often without clear view of where you're supposed to land. This makes hopping over relatively simple gaps in a rope bridge unnecessarily fiddly and slow, and of course you'll die if you miss . . . Graphically, the game uses a watercolor style somewhat similar to *Another World* [*Out of this World*]. It's certainly colorful, and pretty enough, but also lacking in detail. Animation is pretty good as well, with the main characters having some great moves and details (like Morgan's flowing hair). Music is actually pretty excellent, with some jaunty themes and a wide variety of instrumentation. Effects are stock, but do their duty." –Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Insider Insight:
Back in the '90s, video game companies licensed so many heinously bad movies it was more than a little mind boggling. Ever play *The Crow: City of Angels* on the PlayStation or Saturn? Yeesh! *Cutthroat Island* is one of those movies. I rented the game from a local video store and instantly regretted it. The concept of playing as a couple of pirates who go around sword-fighting British soldiers and searching for booty sounds like it would be fun. Alas, it was not. It's such a bare bones beat-'em-up that I wondered as I slogged through the game if the movie it was based on was any better. Alas, it was not. – Christopher Pico

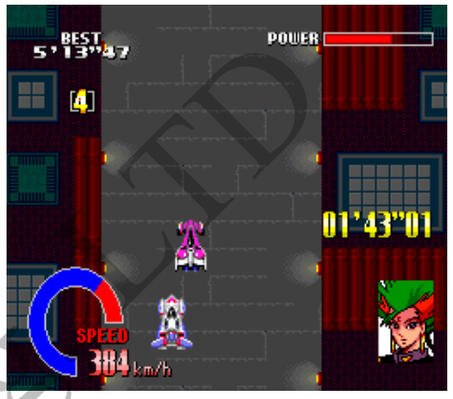
Schiffer Publishing, Ltd

Cyber Spin

PUBLISHER: Takara.
DEVELOPER: Arc System Works.
GAME TYPE: Futuristic Racing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

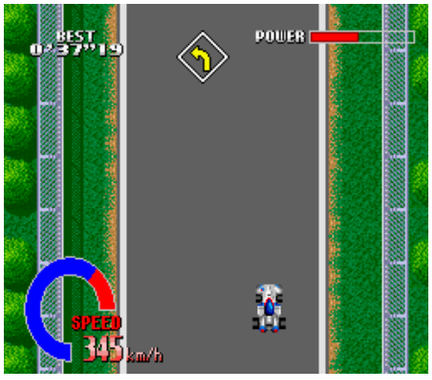
Set in 2015, *Cyber Spin* is an old-school racer with an overhead view of the fast action. Behind the wheel of a futuristic Cyber Car, players compete on ten different twisting, turning tracks in ten different countries: Brazil, Canada, Germany, Norway, Japan, Peru, Kenya, Spain, England, and America. Each location is divided into two races. The first is a time-trial that determines your starting position in the second race. The second race pits you against seven other drivers. If you win, you continue and win points that carry over until the end of the ten-track tournament.

Spinning out, getting hit, and using turbo boosts (for extra speed) drains your car of power, but it can be replenished via pit stops. Since players tend to get blindsided by enemy cars, the game can be frustrating. Icons signal the player when a turn is approaching, but turns appear quickly so repetition/track memorization is helpful. The Japanese version, known as *Shinseiki GPX: Cyber Formula*, is based on the *Future GPX Cyber Formula* anime and includes characters from the franchise as well as story cutscenes. The Japanese game has a free-play mode as well, which lets gamers select from several drivers, each with their own visually unique car.



Notable Quotable:

"It nails a good sense of speed, and the challenging racing will certainly satisfy most players, but a lack of content—especially compared to *Cyber Spin*'s Japanese counterpart—is saddening . . . Tracks become progressively harder, with more tight corners and even some additional hazards such as cliffs and ice. There's a good sense of progression, as earlier tracks appear simple in comparison to what's thrown at you later on . . . Races are difficult and sometimes not for the fairest reasons. It feels like you are a motorbike among a legion of tanks as all collisions cause you to spin out and leave the other driver clean . . . Each track feels quite different from one another, from the cloudy England to the mud-covered Kenya. Tracks feel vibrant and feature a decent degree of detail such as crowds and trackside scenery such as gates. The game runs smoothly, meaning a sense of speed is instilled. The main cars look pretty good . . . Ears won't be too tortured either, with catchy music that fits the futuristic style perfectly. The engines sound good, but the boost effect is more akin to a gas pipe leaking." –Shane Battams (www.thepixelempire.net)



Scrifter Publishing LTD

Cybernator

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: NCS Corporation.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

In *Cybernator*, you control a mech suit-wearing marine who must walk, jump, shoot, fly, dash, and otherwise work his way through seven objective-based levels: Axis Lunar Mining Colony (locate and destroy the battle cruiser's power unit), Asteroid Defense Forces and Orbital Hideout (shut down the ore processing plant), Arc Nova (sabotage the huge mobile weapon hidden within the base), Stratospheric Showdown (penetrate and annihilate Axis forces spread out from terra firma to the edge of the ozone), Madagascar Shuttle Port (destroy the space shuttle), Axis Prime Minister's Mountain Hideout (destroy the antiaircraft weapons facility), and Axis Capital: Suburbionski, Uzbekistanski (use your weapon to lobby for peace in the downtown capital building where the Axis parliament gathers).

You're equipped with a Three-Peater Enemy Eliminator that can rotate and shoot 360 degrees, and you can use such weapons as Vulcan shells, a punching maneuver, laser beams, homing missiles, and an Ionized Indestructoid Shield. Your super stompers provide foot traction on all surfaces. The action is a little clunkier than a game like *Contra*, but there's plenty of stuff to blow up (robots, gun turrets, armored vehicles, alien spacecraft, and the like), and the music and graphics are as heavy-duty as the outfit players wear. In addition, there are "W" icons to grab for weaponry and "P" capsules to pick up for increasing the power of your weapons system. *Cybernator* is frequently interrupted by extraneous text, but fans of such games as *Target Earth* (Genesis) and *Metal Warriors* (SNES) should check it out.

Notable Quotable:

"Konami rocks. Okay, we all know that, but going back and playing a game like *Cybernator* reinforces that point. It's not perfect, nor is it Konami's best of the 16-bit era, but the fact that you can still go back and play it today without the game losing its impact proves this one is an underrated classic . . . While it doesn't push the SNES to its limits, *Cybernator* does provide a nice graphical package. Slowdown is rare, and the mech is animated superbly . . . The only real problem is the ridiculously large explosions that occur when taking out bigger opponents. The screen lights up in a mess of orange and white pixels. It's not pretty . . . The soundtrack to the game is limited, but what is included can't be touched by many other games on the console. The thumping background tracks keep the pace of the onscreen action and keep players moving along . . . *Cybernator* does falter in a few areas. The game is occasionally unfair. Your mech is quite a large sprite so avoiding some of the incoming attacks is almost impossible (the blocking aspect isn't perfect). The free-flying sections are hard to control, and you'll find yourself constantly in the wrong position to shoot enemies. Add in the fact that the game uses every button on the controller and you've got a game that seems overly complicated for what it is." –Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

Insider Insight:

I grew up during the relatively early generations of gaming when, in addition to actually possessing the games, knowledge and ability was something to be respected and envied. Schoolyard myths about how "so and so beat *Ninja Gaiden*!" or "they beat King League in *F-Zero*!" were things to boast about. I had an older cousin who would watch over my brother and I, and with him being a bit older than us, we were scoffed at as two little kids who wanted to "hang with the big kids." Surely, no kid many years younger could show him up in video games. We used to go head-to-head on many games with the NES and SNES—a constant competition of bragging rights: who could get the farthest, or how quickly could whatever level be conquered.

There was one example that always stood out in my memory as one of these games: *Cybernator*. We spent many afternoons and nights tirelessly trying to one-up each other— this was no game to be taken lightly. Memorization and quick thinking were keys in progressing through each stage while avoiding the spray of bullets from the enemy machines. Though none of us actually beat the game at the time, I will always appreciate the respect my cousin gave me as the younger nine-year-old peer who finally put his abilities to shame; at the same time, the game brought us closer together through a shared passion for this great hobby. –Joshua L. Olson

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Daffy Duck:
The Marvin Missions

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft.
DEVELOPER: ICOM Simulations.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Based on *Duck Dodgers in the 24½th Century*, which is the animated *Buck Rogers* spoof from 1953, *Daffy Duck: The Marvin Missions* ably captures the look, sound, and attitude of its source material. As Daffy trying to stop Marvin the Martian from obliterating the galaxy, players must brave five missions (twenty stages) of outer space adventure: Where There's Duck, There's Fire; 20,000 Martians Under the Sea; Duck Dodgers on Ice; The Incredible Shrinking Duck; and The Greatest Show Off Earth.

Daffy uses a blaster and other guns (freeze, bomb, antimatter, and the like) to fire away at a constant onslaught of enemies, including cannons, bees, robots, aliens, caterpillars, flying saucers, and bikers. Special guns and ammo are purchased with money obtained from fallen enemies. Daffy also has a jetpack for flying and shields to block enemy projectiles, and he can ride various platforms to get past dangerous areas. Certain platforms can be repositioned with a shot from Daffy's gun. In addition, Daffy can execute a hilarious Nutty Attack, which sends him jumping and bouncing all over the screen, flailing his fists and feet and pummeling anything and everything—classic Daffy Duck humor.

The biggest drawback to the game is the annoying, sometimes frustrating way Daffy jumps back every time he fires his gun. Still, this is a cartridge fans of Warner Bros. animation will go loony over. Daffy even laughs and speaks a few words, such as "Mother" and "You're despicable." Includes cameos by Elmer Fudd, Yosemite Sam, Sylvester, and Wile E. Coyote. Gossamer, the giant heart-faced monster from the cartoons, is a boss. The Game Boy version, which is Super Game Boy enhanced, is called *Daffy Duck* on the box and *Daffy Duck: The Marvin Missions* on the title screen.

Fun Fact:
In *The 50 Greatest Cartoons: As Selected by 1,000 Animation Professionals* (1994), a book by animation historian Jerry Beck, *Duck Dodgers in the 24½th Century* was ranked #4. The classic cartoon was also nominated for a Hugo Award

Notable Quotable:
"The graphics are top notch. Daffy's sprite is very detailed for his size, and the environments feel alive . . . Daffy is near impossible to control. He feels like he's on ice at all times . . . While underwater, Daffy feels even more floaty . . . The levels themselves are maze-like, but not in a good way. If it wasn't for the frequent checkpoints showing me which direction I'm supposed to be going, I don't think I would have made it through some of the levels . . . Marvin has such an insane amount of health . . . 146 hits it took to kill him . . . that's way too much health for the first boss of the game . . . The controls are horrible, the default gun is useless, the levels are confusing . . . The music is forgettable." –Deadpark: The Many Deaths of a Gamer (www.deadpark.com)

Schiffer Publishing

Darius Twin

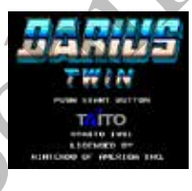
PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Taito.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.

A part of the Darius series, which began in the arcades in 1986, *Darius Twin* is similar to *Sagaia* (a.k.a. *Darius II*) for the Genesis, but is shorter and not as challenging. It does, however, contain a two-player simultaneous mode, something the Genesis version of *Sagaia* lacks. In this game, players fly to the right on twelve planets (seascapes, outer space, mountains, underwater, mechanized areas, etc.), shooting at a variety of large mechanical sea creatures (a *Darius* trademark), including blowfish, angel fish, sharks, crabs, and squid, among others. While there are twelve planets total, you complete a mission by visiting just seven of them—there are sixteen different routes you can take to the seventh and final planet.

Grabbing color-coded power-ups increases strength to your ship's lasers, missiles, bombs, and shields. If your ship gets destroyed, you don't lose all the weapons you've collected, and you continue from that point rather than being sent back earlier in the level to a checkpoint. Bosses move in simple patterns. Casual gamers will appreciate the ease of play, but hardcore bullet-hell fans may want to look elsewhere. Followed by *Super Nova* (SNES), *Darius Gaiden* (various), *G Darius* (various), and other sequels.

Notable Quotable:

"All in all, *Darius Twin* is a decent shooter, but it feels incredibly generic in comparison to the richness of the original games, and it lacks the unique and genuine atmosphere that made the series so iconic." –Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)



Insider Insight:

One summer night when I was a young teen, a friend of my father's won a few hundred bucks in the lottery, and they decided it was a good idea to take my little brother and me to Bally's casino in Atlantic City in the middle of the night. Any semblance of good parenting was pretty much thrown out the window as they dumped us in the casino's arcade with $50 worth of quarters for about five hours.

The arcade, by post-Crash standards, was deluxe. It had two things I'd not seen before or since: a video jukebox with a giant screen and a *Darius* arcade game. The monstrous *Darius* cabinet was the largest arcade game, if not the largest object, I'd ever seen in my life. There was a wait line reminiscent of the early days of *Pac-Man*, and to pass the time we watched "Take on Me" on the video jukebox about eleven times.

Unfortunately, the game was a dud. Although it possessed a screen the size you would typically find in a small movie theater, the objects in the game were all tiny. Gameplay consisted of wondering where your own ship was and crashing into mountains. It was a bad game, but it was a legend, and over the years as the console versions rolled out, they have been kind of a tough find where I live. And surprisingly, they (speaking of *Darius Twin*, *Darius Gaiden*, and *G Darius*) were all pretty good games. Not top-tier shooters, but you could do worse in terms of graphics, music, control, and pattern-based gameplay. And you get to blow up giant fish—nothing wrong with that.

Darius Twin was one of my Blockbuster rentals, and I was a repeat customer. The difficulty level is refreshingly tame, and the options menu allows you to load up to eight extra ships. Your path in the game branches off between levels, so you get more variety than most shooters of the day. The Genesis did better in the shooter department (and has its own lesser Darius game called *Sagaia*), so on the SNES *Darius Twin* ranks high in the category of outer space shooting action. I'd have been better off purchasing the game than renting it five times, but something about it kept me coming back. Don't skip the intro scene—it's cool. –Jeff Belmonte

Scriffer Publishing LTD

David Crane's Amazing Tennis

PUBLISHER: Absolute Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering Inc.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Tennis, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

Designed and programmed by the developer of such Atari 2600 classics as *Pitfall!* and *The Activision Decathlon*, *David Crane's Amazing Tennis* has a low view of the court, which sets it apart from the pack. The graphics and animations are nice, and the game has a number of nifty features, including three courts (clay, grass, hard), a Tournament mode (sixteen players of varying abilities compete for the championship), and many types of shots: topspin, drop shots, volleys, lobs, slices, overhead smashes, and hard and soft serves. Gamers can also decide whether to play as a right- or left-handed tennis player.

The Super Nintendo version of the game has better music and voice effects, more colors, and a more active crowd than the Genesis cart. In addition, the SNES rendition has a dedicated button for volleys. The Genesis game has crisper, yet less detailed graphics, and it seems to play a little faster.

Notable Quotable:

"This is a real perspective tennis game, with pseudo-perspective displays. There have been many tennis games over the years, and most of them are glorified versions of *Pong*. The games are masked with enhanced graphics and sound effects. *Amazing Tennis* has a 3D display, with a camera perspective right behind the player. You feel like you are on the screen. I've been a tournament tennis player for years, and that really helped with the perspective." –David Crane (*2600 Connection*, 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The box for *Amazing Tennis* features the quote '. . . amazingly good . . . ' from *Nintendo Power* (March 1992). *Really*, *Nintendo Power*? Did you even *play* this game? I should say *try* to play it! If David Crane designed this, then Pitfall Harry must be *rolling in his grave*. The game employs a low-to-court camera angle in an ill-fated attempt to make the player feel 'in the game.' This may allow for large, detailed players, but it makes the game *impossible to play* . . . it's hard to judge where the large ball is with respect to your player, and if you're on the far side of the court, *good luck*! The net completely blocks your view! The outdated player outfits are hilarious, with guys wearing spandex under their shorty-shorts and donning shirts with pastel colors. The manner in which they scamper to and from the net makes them look like complete sissies. *David Crane's Amazing Tennis* is terrible, and one could argue that the $5 Footlocker coupon included with it is more valuable than the game itself. And yes, I'm taking into account that it expired in 1993!" –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Archer Publishing LTD

The Death and Return of Superman

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft of America.
DEVELOPER: Blizzard Entertainment/ Sunsoft of America.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Based on DC Comics' popular *The Death of Superman* and *The Reign of the Supermen* storylines, this game finds Doomsday destroying Metropolis and fighting Superman to the death. Depending on the level being played, gamers will control Superman or one of the four pretenders to the throne: Eradicator, The Cyborg, Superboy, or Steel. Each character has a special weapon (such as heat vision or energy blasts) and a special attack (such as hover blasts or bombs), but most of the time is spent punching or jump-kicking the game's chainsaw-wielding thugs, dynamite-throwing bad guys, and other enemies.

Gameplay evokes *Final Fight* and *Streets of Rage*, but with more redundant attacks and enemies. Each character can fly during standard levels and in a few side-scrolling shooter stages (which are ridiculously easy), but walking is the more frequent mode of getting through most areas. You'll also ride elevators and dodge falling rocks. There are ten levels of play: Siege of the Underworlders, Doomsday in Metropolis, Assault on Cadmus, The Last Son of Krypton, Ambush at Coast City, The Metropolis Kid, Steel Reign, Metropolis Ground Zero, The Engine's Core, The Return of Superman, and Once Again, The World is Safe. You'll use lots of continues to see them all. This is one of the better-looking and playing Superman games for any system, which admittedly isn't saying much, but it is fun. Very similar to the Genesis version.

Memories:
When *Superman* (vol. 2) #75 featuring the death of Superman was published in 1993, I was the co-owner of Fantastic Comics & Cards in North Richland Hills, Texas (a suburb of Fort Worth). It was a huge media event, but unfortunately, the day before the issue came out, I had totaled my car and was out looking for a new vehicle. This left the lone employee working the store all day by himself, swamped fielding phone calls and taking pre-orders. Fortunately, I did report for work the next day when the issue was on the stands. Like most every other store in the country, we quickly sold out. The video game tie-in arrived later with far less fanfare, but I enjoyed it and still break it out from time to time. There aren't many good Superman video games (*Superman* for the NES and *Superman* for the Nintendo 64 are two of the worst games I've had the displeasure of playing), so *The Death and Return of Superman* stands out as being distinctly playable.

Insider Insight:
Back in 1994, I loved beat-'em-ups, and I loved comic books (okay, so maybe that's me today, too). In every way, I was the target audience for *The Death and Return of Superman*, and I simply could not wait for this video game adaptation of arguably the biggest event in comic book history to come out. When it did, I played through it. And I moved on, not loving or hating it. Unlike, say, *Maximum Carnage*, which made me an even bigger Spider-Man fan, *Death and Return* just kind of came and went. (Not something you're used to hearing about a game developed by Blizzard, huh?)

The game shipped close to a year after the comic event ended, which makes one of my biggest gripes with it inexcusable—namely, it just doesn't tell the story very well. One major example of this: In the comics, you at least felt some degree of betrayal by Cyborg Superman once he reveals himself to be the villain of the story, because he's done a series of truly heroic things. In this game, all he does is beat up the (only slightly corrupt) Cadmus corporation guards in level three. By the end of level five, you as the Eradicator are already fighting him out of the blue with no real sense of "whoa, you totally betrayed us, dude!" that you get from the comic.

They cut corners everywhere else, too. This isn't a super-long game, yet it recycles environments among different Supermen, and it rehashes enemy sprites in different contexts—a Cadmus Sky Sentinel and a flying alien from Warworld should have nothing in common, yet they look and fight exactly the same outside of a palette swap. To that end, the key enemy figure from Warworld, Mongul, is nowhere to be found in the game, nor are certain other important characters, like Supergirl, Lex Luthor, the Guardian, Green Lantern, and the entire freaking Justice League of America. All that, and Superman can die by Molotov cocktail. That's pretty lame. –Chris Baker

Sniffer Publishing LTD

Demolition Man

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Alexandria.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

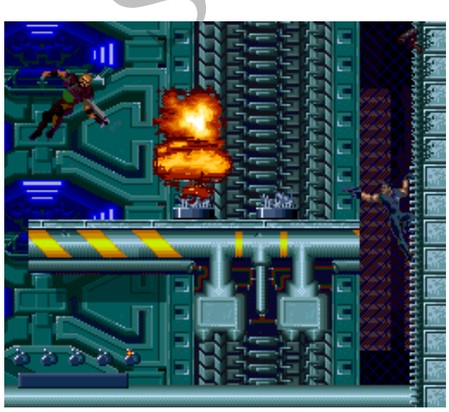
Based on the 1993 feature film, *Demolition Man* puts players in the Sylvester Stallone role of Spartan ("The 20th century's most dangerous cop"), trying to capture Simon Phoenix, who was played in the movie by Wesley Snipes. The game consists of ten levels: five platforming similar to *Contra* and five top-down similar to *Smash T.V.* The game moves at a rapid clip, with Spartan running, jumping, climbing, swinging hand over hand, and shooting (with a pistol, a shotgun, and a magnum) his way through the futuristic utopia of San Angeles.

Spartan can also use such items as hand grenades, flare grenades, infrared goggles, armor, medi-packs, and freeze vials. There are lots of enemies to kill, but players should avoid harming innocents. The action gets very busy at times, creating some slowdown, and certain parts are tough to get through, but hardy shooter fans will stick with *Demolition Man* until the satisfying conclusion.

Nicely detailed graphics, cool sound effects (including voices), and a terrific score by Tommy Tallarico add to the fun. The Sega CD version is similar, but includes digitized film footage. Also released for the Genesis. Much different than the 3DO game, which has driving, fighting, and first-person levels.

Notable Quotable:

"The stages are really big and dynamic and have lots of nooks and crannies to explore. One particularly cool thing about the side-scrolling stages is how vertical they tend to be, with lots of climbing and ledge-hopping to get to higher levels. There're always obstacles and terrain of varying height jutting up in front of you, from electrical towers connected by zip lines to bungie-jumps off collapsing buildings. In one stage, you'll track Phoenix through a complex network of pipes, and you'll only be able to see yourself or Phoenix through small holes. In another stage, you'll spend almost the entire time jumping from zip line to zip line through a huge cavern. The graphics during these side-scrolling segments are fairly pleasant . . . Unfortunately, not all is well . . . the controls are a bit rough. Spartan has a pretty sad little jump straight up that really isn't good for anything aside from reaching a ledge just overhead. Pressing forward and jump makes Spartan do an elongated *Prince of Persia*-style jump that has a fixed length, and attempting to do anything with it once your feet leave the ground tends to lead to Spartan having a mid-air seizure before falling to his death . . . Also, once Spartan gets going, he goes way too fast, and stopping before encountering pitfalls and other environmental hazards can be difficult . . . then there're the overhead stages, which just suck. Your objective is to rescue civilians, but these sequences are more like an old game of *Gauntlet* than anything else, with a constant stream of 'samey' bad guys coming toward you . . . In spite of all of this, however, *Demolition Man* is still a really solid game." –David DeRienzo (www.hardcoregaming101.net)



Schiffer Publishing Ltd.

Demon's Crest

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

A follow-up to *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* (SNES) and the sequel to *Gargoyle's Quest II: The Demon Darkness* (NES), *Demon's Crest* stars the red demon Firebrand (a.k.a. Red Arremer), one of the toughest, quickest enemies from *Ghosts 'n Goblins*. This time, however, he's the hero, as players help him recover six powerful stones. During the quest, which takes place through catacombs, forests, mountains, towers, and the like, ghosts, goblins, and other creatures will attack. Luckily, Red Demon can fly, breathe fire, head-butt, and pick up additional weapons, including buster (blast through stone blocks), tornado (reach high areas), claw (grab onto walls with spikes), and demon fire (the most powerful weapon).

What sets *Demon's Crest* apart from the pack of side-scrolling action/adventure games are strategic elements derived from an assortment of talismans, spells, and potions. By finding stones, Firebrand can morph into Ground Gargoyle (great speed, strength to break stone statues), Aerial Gargoyle (soar higher in the air), Tidal Gargoyle (breathe underwater), and Legendary Gargoyle (less damage from enemy contact). Three different endings are possible, and an overhead view realm/map screen lets players select areas to explore. In addition, the game has gorgeously hellish graphics and a distinct lack of slowdown. The only setbacks are a disappointing soundtrack and repetitious enemy movement. The quality and rarity of this game has caused a frenzy in the collector's market, making complete copies very expensive.

Notable Quotable:

"The control system used in *Demon's Crest* is lightyears ahead of the Ghosts 'N Goblins series. Not only do you have full mid-air control of Firebrand in this one, but you also have a wide range of attacks and special moves . . . This is a game that's going to take a lot of playing in order to beat, so prepare yourself accordingly. But other than the stiff degree of difficulty, this is a terrific game with a surprising amount of depth for a side scroller . . . Each area has a very spooky and distinctive look to it, complete with the high level of detail we've come to expect from Capcom. You'll see everything from graveyards and towers to the underwater city of Atlantis . . . The visuals are some of the best the Super NES has to offer, and the sheer level of detail, even in the distant backgrounds, is astonishing . . . It's hard to find anything not to like about *Demon's Crest*, despite its difficulty. The ability to play the levels in different orders, not to mention the free-roaming feel of the game, make it seem like an RPG at times." –Corbie Dillard (www.nintendolife.com), reviewing the SNES game downloaded to the Wii U.

Insider Insight:

Demon's Crest, which my good friend Blake Leftwich gave me for my birthday, is one of those games that puzzles me to this day. Why would Capcom create such a foreboding and scary game and market it in the pre-ESRB era? There is no gore, and the violence is really nothing more than you would see in a similar game, but the atmosphere, visuals, and sounds scream with overtones of fire, demons, and monsters.

I loved it, but it was one of those games I hid from my family. It plays like many games: fight bosses, gain abilities, and lay waste to all the enemies. I finished the game, and the ending was so bleak and disturbing it ranks up there with *Silent Hill* and *Resident Evil* for me. After I defeated a massive dragon, it threw the Demon Realm into chaos—heavy stuff for a Super Nintendo game. There are better endings in the game, but after that one I shelved my copy. –Stephen Smith

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Dennis the Menace

PUBLISHER: Ocean of America.
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Based on the live-action *Dennis the Menace* (1993) feature film, which has its roots in the Hank Ketcham comic strip and the 1950s television series, this is one of those games with a kid-friendly license, but long, timed, non-linear levels that are hard to complete. Dennis, who can walk, duck, climb, run, and jump, must work his way through Mr. Wilson's House (Walter Matthau played Mr. Wilson in the movie, and looks like himself in the game), The Park, The Boiler Room, The Sewer, and The Woods, using a short list of weak weaponry to battle such enemies as birds, frogs, bunnies, fish, and fire goblins.

Dennis, who was played by Mason Gamble in the film, begins with a water pistol, which can stun some (but not all) of the enemies, and he can pick up a short-range slingshot and a long-range pea-shooter. There are hot coals, dripping hot water, and other obstacles to avoid, along with annoying blind jumps to contend with. In each level, Dennis must find Mr. Wilson's coins before he can exit. There are also bosses, including Betty Sue Dubrovski, who swoops back and forth on her swing; Coach Beefman, who hurls medicine balls and baseballs; and Switchblade Sam, who throws apples and is holding Joey and Margaret captive. Known simply as *Dennis* in Europe. Also released for the Game Boy.

Notable Quotable:

"It's a bit like the Home Alone games in that everything is out to kill you, it's a mystery where you're supposed to go, and the controls don't exactly help you either . . . There are way too many things onscreen that can drain your energy, and they are ridiculously inconsistent: a cactus can't hurt you but a record player can? And since jumping is a pain as most platforms are tough to reach, and you can't just bounce on enemies to get rid of them, this becomes really frustrating really fast. I can't stress enough just how confusing the layouts of these locations are . . . The music is not too bad, even though it becomes tiresome soon enough . . . the sound effects are one of the most annoying aspects of the game . . . Sort of like the Dennis character himself, this game is one mean-spirited little brat." –Retro Critic (retrocriticblog.blogspot.com)

Scuffer Publishing

Desert Strike:
Return to the Gulf

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: Electronic Arts.
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

Viewed from an isometric perspective, *Desert Strike* takes place in the aftermath of the Gulf War, with players flying an Apache helicopter over land, air, and sea, using a chain gun, hydras, and hellfire missiles to destroy gun turrets, soldiers, choppers, jeeps, speedboats, MIGs, command centers, and other enemy targets. Said targets are locatable via computer battle maps. Other objectives include airlifting and dropping off commandos, rescuing pilots lost at sea, grabbing armor, fuel, ammunition, and more. Like its equally enjoyable Genesis counterpart, which has better music but less realistic sound effects, *Desert Strike* for the SNES features some nifty between-level cinemas. Followed by *Jungle Strike* (SNES, Genesis, Game Boy, Game Gear), *Urban Strike* (SNES, Genesis, Game Boy, Game Gear), *Soviet Strike* (Saturn, PSX, PS3, PSP, PS Vita) and *Nuclear Strike* (N64, PSX, PS3, PSP).

Insider Insight:
I played *Desert Strike: Return to the Gulf* as a young boy and remember it fondly. I credit my play style, game preference, and even my online handle (General Jason) to *Desert Strike*.

The hot desert sand kicks up underneath me as I pilot my Apache Heli headed north! General Jason is inbound, locked and loaded, ready to rescue POWs and destroy enemy bunkers with HYDRA missiles! *Desert Strike* put me in the pilot seat and made me feel like I was in full control of the war effort. It introduced new gameplay tactics that I prefer in my games now. *Desert Strike* taught me strategy, planning, and being aware of my inventory and surroundings.

The last game I played before *Desert Strike* that put me in control of a war was *Combat* for Atari 2600, which of course was like playing with green army men in comparison. *Desert Strike* was the first time I felt important in a game. My actions had reactions, people's lives were on the line, and it was up to me to rescue them and return them home safely. The gameplay is smooth, and the Heli has physics, which gives it weight and realism. You can play at your own pace but have to be aware of time, fuel consumption, and ammo count. The Gulf War won't wait for you to eat your fruit snacks and drink your Kool-Aid Jammer—it's GO TIME!

When I produce sound design for video games today, I always think of *Desert Strike*, as it showed me the importance of sound effects placement and music in a game. When you launch into a mission there's no music—it's the sound of your Heli, enemy fire, and explosions. You really feel like you're there!

Desert Strike flew into high ranks while smashing sales records for any Electronic Arts game released prior. Magazines and review scores were all ninety and above across the board. Thank you, *Desert Strike*, for giving me so many years of combat training. Now if I can only figure out how to fit my plastic army men in my Apache . . . –Jason Heine

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

D-Force

PUBLISHER: Asmik.
DEVELOPER: Cream.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

D-Force puts players at the helm of a Nuclear Apache Helicopter, firing cannons and missiles at enemy aircraft, dinosaurs, tanks, killer birds, and other cannon fodder through seven short levels (encompassing six countries): The Gulf Installation, Inland Sector 1, Mirage Installation, Mythical East, Fantasy Icequarters, Inland Sector 2, and Enemy Headquarters. The objective is to defeat a powerful, oil-rich dictator in the Middle East who has waged war on the world.

The game alternates between two types of levels. "Shooting" levels pit you against helicopters and warplanes while so-called "Exploration" levels have you firing away at animals. Both offer fairly straightforward vertical shooting, but pressing the shoulder buttons during Exploration levels adjusts the altitude of your helicopter so you can shoot enemies at different heights. Defeated enemies sometimes drop power-ups that improve your chopper's standard weapon or equip it with homing missiles as a secondary weapon. Special weapons include multi-cannon, super-cannon, electrowave with sidewinder missiles, and multi-cannon d-force with sidewinder missiles. The game is hard but manageable (thanks to some really effective power-ups), though there is slowdown and some unfair deaths when the action gets overly intense. Known as *Dimension Force* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"*D-Force* is a largely forgettable vertical shoot-'em-up with little to distinguish it from the myriad of similar games that haunted arcades since *Xevious* hit in 1983. Still, this was one of the first SNES games (released in December 1991, just a few months after the system hit shelves in North America), so it's worth a look . . . about as basic as it gets. You glue your thumb to the 'B' button to shoot, and focus on dodging enemies and projectiles with the d-pad . . . Exploration levels [are] not particularly well-executed . . . distracting visually, as it involves the game just zooming in around your helicopter, which stays the same size. In effect, you're not descending, you're shrinking . . . often giving the game too many onscreen assets to handle at once, resulting in noticeable slowdown . . . Though the graphics are simple and somewhat cartoony, the game takes full advantage of the Super Nintendo's much vaunted Mode 7 graphics for some ambitious (if occasionally disorienting) background effects. Enemies move fluidly, and even your helicopter has a neat little banking effect. The sound is lively (though repetitive) with an especially funky track for the first-level boss fight. The controls can be a bit jerky at times, but they're easy enough to get used to. You will find yourself in a lot of no-win positions, though, and there's very little room for error when maneuvering around some of the more heavily armed enemies."
–Karsten (karstenwritesstuff.wordpress.com)

Insider Insight:

Electronics Boutique marked *D-Force* down to $20 just weeks after its release. To put that into perspective, this was the first sub-$40 game I ever saw for the SNES, so I had to buy it even though I was saving up for *ActRaiser*. I was on my lunch break working at Taco Bell and didn't think twice about buying it. At the time, $20 was five hours of my salary: chump change compared to all the hours I imagined I would get out of blasting enemy aircraft from the sky and rocking to some sweet SNES chiptune music.

D-Force was a lot of fun for the first couple of minutes. It had it all: an arcade-quality title screen, 16-bit graphics, Mode 7 background scaling effects, good music, and a decent start to the first level. I couldn't believe the bargain I had gotten, and initially I couldn't help but think that the price must have been a mistake.

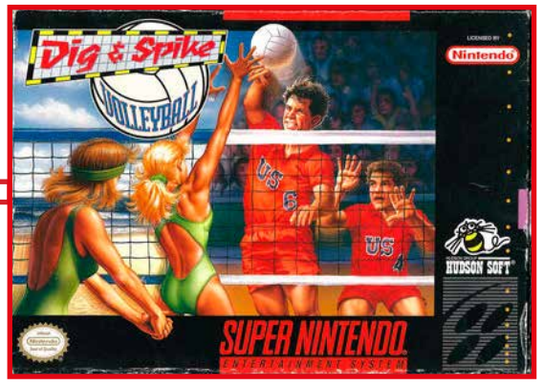
However, after shooting down the first few waves of enemies, things began spiraling out of control. I realized that the game consists of repeating the same few waves over and over again until you reach the boss. Some of the enemy patterns are downright unfair, flying in without warning from the bottom of the screen, instantly killing you. At first, the music is good until you realize all the tracks loop every twenty to thirty seconds and quickly become maddening to listen to.

The trade-off on this is still up for debate: five hours of wrapping tacos and mopping floors for a couple of minutes of 16-bit bliss. Nah, it was obvious to me even back then that the $20 I paid for the game was about $19.99 too much. In fact, *D-Force* was the first cartridge I ever returned to the store due to its lack of gameplay value.
–Russ Kumro

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Dig & Spike Volleyball

PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft.
DEVELOPER: TOSE.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Volleyball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

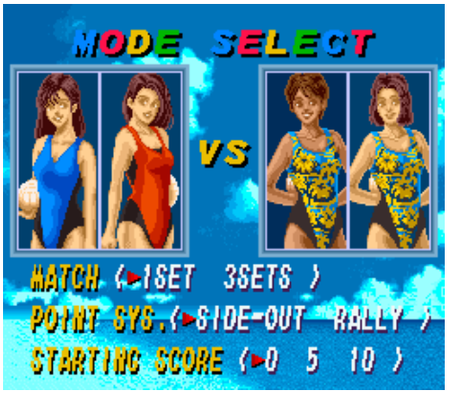


Featuring an elevated/angled side-view perspective, which is preferable to the low side-view of *Hyper V-Ball*, *Dig & Spike Volleyball* has solid controls, a good variety of shots, and decent graphics. However, the animation is stiff and slow, and the ball moves slowly across the court, making it a little tricky for the receiving team to maneuver into position. There's two-on-two women's beach volleyball and a six-on-six men's indoor rendition of the game. Both versions have an inset radar showing where each player is located on the court, and both let you play rally score, where a point is scored every time the ball hits the floor, or side-out, where only the serving team scores when the ball hits the floor on the opponent's side. Matches consist of one, three, or five games, depending on the option selected, but games are always played to fifteen.

In beach volleyball, gamers can play against the computer or a human opponent, or team up with a human opponent to challenge the computer. In the indoor mode, you can only play the computer or a human opponent, but there is a training option available. There are eight playable indoor teams: Algeria, Brazil, Cuba, Commonwealth of Independent States (former Soviet Union countries), Italy, Japan, The Netherlands, and the United States. Both play styles have tournament modes: World Challenge for beach, World Cup for indoor. Known as *Volleyball Twin* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:
"*Dig & Spike Volleyball* is a fairly fun game to play, but it grows stale after a while. It's one of those games that really needs multi-player compatibility—a party type game would pump up the excitement level during gameplay and add more replay value as well." –*Game Players* (May, 1994)

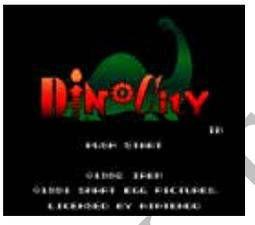
Notable Quotable:
"The indoor volleyball in this game is pretty decent. You can do most things fairly well, with two exceptions. The digging is near impossible. Any digs that I got felt almost lucky as my guy just happened to be in the right place. The camera makes it hard for you to see where the other team is aiming, so you have literally no time to react. To counteract this (or for some other reason), aces are extremely easy to get. Simply by jumping and executing a spin serve, you can accumulate a large number of aces. When you try to experiment and serve different places you often miss. Overall, *Dig & Spike Volleyball* makes a valiant effort in creating a fun volleyball game, but the gameplay doesn't end up working well. Weird cameras, overpowered A.I., and some strange balance issues make *Dig & Spike Volleyball* a below-average game." –Yes Guy Gaming (yesguygaming.com)



Schiffer Publishing, LTD.

DinoCity

PUBLISHER: Irem America Corporation.
DEVELOPER: Irem Software Engineering, Inc.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1992.



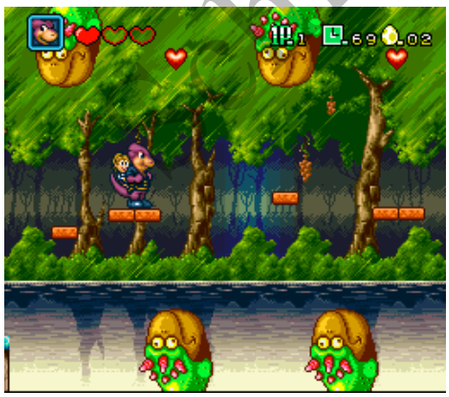
Timmy and his friend Jamie are watching a movie on the big screen in Tommy's father's lab. Suddenly, they get transported to prehistoric times: a nicely rendered world of caves, jungles, grasslands, ice caverns, mountains, ruins, and anthropomorphic dinosaurs. To return home, the kids must reclaim a time machine that was stolen by a group of Neanderthals called The Rockies.

Gamers play as either Timmy or Jamie, riding atop a friendly, cartoonish dinosaur. Timmy rides Rex while Jamie rides Tops. To battle enemies (birds, seals, Skull Munchers, Neanderthals, skulls, jumping fish, etc.) through the game's six timed levels, Tops throws darts while Rex punches and swings his tail. They can jump on enemies as well. To jump higher, you can dismount from the dinosaur. While you are controlling Timmy or Jamie directly, you can freeze enemies with a remote control, and the dinosaurs become immobile and can be used as platforms.

Players also ride moving platforms; negotiate steep terrain; dodge fireballs; battle bosses; climb ropes; ride Ferris wheels, little boats, and roller coasters; and more. Loosely based on the 1991 made-for-TV movie, *Adventures in Dinosaur City* by Smart Egg Pictures. Released in Japan as *Dinowars Kyōryū Ōkoku e no Daibōken* (*Dinowars: Adventures in the Dinosaur Kingdom*).

Notable Quotable:

"Don't let the cutesy kid-riding-dinosaur thing fool you. *DinoCity* is a nice-looking platform game, with a downright brutal difficulty level. The first level alone makes your average *Mega Man* level look easy. The disappearing-reappearing platforms are a key part to this game, and they are tiny. Also, this has *Super Mario Bros.*-style 'you can't go backwards in a level' thing going on. In parts, the enemies are relentless. There are lots of midway point saves, which makes it so that the levels are beatable." –SNES Central (snescentral.com)



Retro Gamer Publishing LTD

Dirt Trax FX

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Motorcycle Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Released in 1995, the same year the PlayStation and Saturn came out, *Dirt Trax FX* was designed to compete with the next generation consoles. Like *Star Fox* and *Stunt Race FX*, the game is equipped with a Super FX co-processor chip to generate 3D polygonal graphics. Each player selects one of nine dorky-looking, faux-cool racers: Hawk, Slash, Blade, Hog, Spike, Talon, Fang, Nails, or T-Rex. Each racer seems to have roughly the same racing skill (despite variances in such things as top speed and cornering ability), but there are four distinct motorcycles to ride: 50CC (easy), 125CC (normal), 250CC (hard), and 500CC (master), the last of which appears only after all five circuits—Motocross, Radical, Nightmare, Doom, and Forbidden—have been completed.

Modes of play include Circuit, Training, and Rad Tag (a "leaping game of hide and seek"). There are twenty-two tracks in all. The camera follows your bike from behind as you race around twisting, turning tracks (including mud, snow, and underground), jumping ramps, and bumping into and trying to pass other bikers. The synth-pop music is awful, and the graphics are bland (if colorful), but the bikes handle surprisingly well. *Dirt Trax FX* has been called a 3D *Excitebike* (the terrific NES racer) by some fans, a comparison that is not without merit.

Notable Quotable:

"Each character has their own theme song that plays whenever they take the lead . . . This really adds an interesting and somewhat unique dimension to the game . . . The frame rate may leave a lot to be desired, but the un-textured polygons certainly have their own unique aesthetic . . . a rather enjoyable game that caters to pretty much all skill levels . . . quite a worthwhile play . . . The only thing I didn't like was the turn radius of the bikes . . . It felt like I was sometimes trying to turn a mini-van around when I was actually turning a bike . . . The walls were sometimes glitchy . . . If I fell off course and I couldn't get back over the wall fully, sometimes the mere act of turning would actually get me over that wall." –Drew Wilson (www.freezenet.ca)

Scarfet Publishing, LLC

Donkey Kong Country

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Bolstered by CGI rendered backgrounds, excellent animation, and robust music and sound effects, *Donkey Kong Country* is a lavishly illustrated, hugely enjoyable adventure that breathed life into the aging Super NES console. Players guide Donkey Kong (a new character related to the classic arcade ape) and his sidekick, Diddy Kong, through more than one hundred challenging, secret-filled levels of running, jumping, climbing, swimming, swinging, banana-collecting action. Gameplay is cooperative, with one or two players alternating between Donkey and Diddy. When you want to turn control of the game over to the other player/character, press the select button. Control also switches to the other player/character when you die, so your gaming partner needs to be ready to take over. One strategy is to switch control to the stronger player during difficult areas.

Both Donkey, whose specialty is a barrel roll, and Diddy, whose signature move is a cartwheel attack, can jump on the reptilian Kremlings inhabiting the game, as well as pick up and throw barrels at them. Kremlings come in many forms, including beasts resembling buzzards (Necky), armadillos (Army), snakes (Slippa), and large muscular creatures with fangs (Kritter, Krusha, Klump, and Rock Kroc). You can also pick up and throw barrels at enemies, and you will often be shot out of cannons, some of which lead to bonus rounds. At various points you can ride on animal friends: Rambi the Rhino (breaks into secret doors), Expresso the Ostrich (runs fast, makes long leaps), Enguarde the Swordfish (swims fast, stabs enemies), and Winky the Frog (jumps high, has powerful attack). You will also ride these animals during bonus rounds. Squawks the Parrot also appears, lighting your way through dark areas. Worlds to explore, which are filled with such hazards as burning oil drums, icy platforms, and/or rickety scaffolding, include: Jungle, Factory, Underwater, Mountains, Treetops, Caves, Mines (where the apes ride mine carts), and Ruins. This is a marvelous game and one of the all-time great platformers. Also released for the Game Boy Color and Game Boy Advance.

Insider Insight:
I will never forget the first time I saw *Donkey Kong Country*. I was at a Toys"R"Us, most likely to look at clearance Genesis stuff, when I witnessed a crowd of children watching this amazing game on a store display screen. Rumors had predicted a new Nintendo system called "Ultra 64," and judging by the appearance of this new game, I thought the console was already on display. It was obvious from what I was seeing on the screen that the Ultra 64 was vastly superior to the Genesis and Super Nintendo. Donkey Kong, followed by a little ape, was romping through what appeared to be a three-dimensional jungle. I had never seen a video game with such a pronounced illusion of depth, including games that utilized 3D glasses. The game appeared to jump right off the screen.

As the crowd began to thin out I made my way to the front, eager to try out the new system's controller. I peered over the shoulder of the boy in front of me, and he was holding a Super Nintendo controller. Inside the kiosk was a Super Nintendo system. WHAT??? I simply could not reconcile the game on the screen with the console in the kiosk. I thought maybe Nintendo had released an enhanced version of the SNES. Granted, at the time I was not nearly as well-versed on the Super Nintendo's capabilities as I am now, but to this day I cannot think of another game that out-and-out defied what I thought was even possible graphically on its system. –Jeff Belmonte

Insider Insight:
I was a Nintendo loyalist during the 16-bit wars, looking at Sega during that period as some sort of evil head of state or something. I cheered as the SNES closed the gap with the Genesis, but once again grew concerned as more advanced technology started hitting the market from the evil Sega and other companies.

My jaw hit the floor when I saw the first previews of *Donkey Kong Country*, because I simply couldn't believe that the SNES was producing those graphics. At the same time, I was thrilled that Nintendo was firing back

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on the competition without having to release a bunch of console add-ons or a new system. It was also exciting to see the Donkey Kong character back in action, as the success of Mario, Zelda, and Metroid had made me feel like Nintendo's first star was forever lost in the shuffle.

This was the first video game I ever pre-ordered, and thinking about it now, possibly the only game that I ever pre-ordered. I took off of work on launch day so that I could pick it up from the store and have all day to play. It only took me a few days to finish it, but I had so much fun that I went back and started over at least a dozen times in the months that followed.

In more than thirty-five years of gaming, I must have played tens of thousands of games. Yet *Donkey Kong Country* is one of only a handful of titles that makes me smile just from the introduction screen alone, right up there with *Pac-Man* and the original *Legend of Zelda*. Plus, at this point in my life, I find myself relating more than ever to Cranky Kong. A true pioneer, that guy. –Patrick Scott Patterson

Insider Insight:
In a world of millions of games there's always the one that never gets old—the one that for whatever reason never loses its spark and always provides the same level of eternal enjoyment no matter how many times you've played it or finished the entire game. For me, it's *Donkey Kong Country*, one of the most perfect games ever made.

It was an absolute smash hit for Nintendo and appealed to such a wide range of players that, for a time there, it appeared as if everyone in the world was playing it. Everywhere I went, whenever I came across another gamer, *Donkey Kong Country* was often the first topic of conversation to come up. And each time it did, the first communication on the subject before a single word came out of their mouths always began with a smile. The game made people feel good. I've never seen anyone ever speak about *Donkey Kong Country* without smiling.

For some strange and wonderful reason, *Donkey Kong Country* made people instantly happy in the way that *Pac-Man* had in the previous decade, possessing the same kinds of things that produce a sense of well-being in the player. I've never been sure exactly what that is, if it's color or sound or a combination of both, but whatever it is it spoke directly to the sense of wonder in every child and drew out the child in every adult.

A sense of supreme adventure is consistently present in this game, with each of the levels providing an immediate and satisfying sensation of conquest, all set to one of the best soundtracks for a game ever created. To this day, whenever I want to escape from whatever it is in the world that's bringing me down, or maybe I just want to lose myself in the place inside me that only the child I once was can remember, I plug in the game and run through the jungle. And I always feel happy. Always have a smile. –Catherine DeSpira

Insider Insight:
When I married into the whole gaming world, I was such an imposter. My video game experience was limited to post-football Friday nights at the Mazzio's Pizza arcade with my fellow marching band buddies, and even then, my playing time was limited by my shortage of quarters, not to mention my lack of eye-hand coordination. I didn't get a lot of practice at home, either, since our only game console was a Sears *Pong* knock-off. Even through college, I spent more time playing cards and watching movies than firing digital missiles or jumping pixelated barrels.

Then I met Brett. Brett, the guy who knew every old and new game. Brett, the one who kept a running tally of his high scores in a spiral notebook. Brett, who owned more than a dozen old consoles.

I could've just cut my losses and left the gaming to him, but I happened to like spending time with him, and if a round or two of *Street Fighter II* could make him happy, I could oblige. But there was a problem: I happen to be a tad competitive—OK, a LOT competitive. What were supposed to be cozy evenings spent bonding over the SNES turned into unrelenting beat-downs when the experienced gamer pummeled the n00b. Our "together time" was overshadowed by cussing and yelling, and yes, tears, all because E. Honda never gave poor Chun-Li a chance.

Then *Donkey Kong Country* changed my life and saved my marriage.

Pardon the hyperbole (and the ridiculous undersell of our love), but my savior was that one blessed word: COOPERATIVE. Finally, we had a game we could play together. With Brett as Donkey Kong, I could tag along as his Diddy. Off we'd go through Ropey's Rampage or the level that warmed my roller coaster-loving heart, Mine Cart Carnage. My Diddy happily played second banana to the master gamer, tagging in when we needed to jump extra high, tagging out when the big bad boss showed up. We'd work together to collect our emus and swordfish, and we'd take turns playing those fun bonus rounds.

Knowing that we could bank those extra life balloons made *DKC* even better; sometimes one of us would fire up the game before the other was even in the room to build up a bunch of lives before we returned to our saved game. Added bonus: *DKC* was linear enough for my old-school brain to get, unlike some of the more spatial wandering games that lost my interest along with my avatar.

Brett's video game collection has grown over the years, but nothing in his big ol' game room will ever take the place of the cart that soothed my *Street Fighter II*-broken heart, *Donkey Kong Country*. –Charis McCoy Weiss

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Donkey Kong Country 2:
Diddy Kong's Quest

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

In *DKC2*, Diddy Kong and his girlfriend Dixie Kong (who boasts a spinning helicopter attack that also lets her float) must rescue a kidnapped Donkey Kong. As Diddy and Dixie run, jump, swing, climb, and swim through the game's vast, secret-filled worlds (Gangplank Alley, Crocodile Cauldron, Krem Quay, Krazy Kremland, Gloomy Gulch, Lost World, and K. Rool's Keep), players alternate between control of the characters as desired by pressing the select button.

Once again, control also switches to the other player/character when you die, so the player not currently controlling the action should stay prepared. Also like the original *DKC*, this sequel has bananas and balloons to grab (for extra lives) and animals to ride, but there are lots of fresh friends and enemies, including two new rideable creatures: Rattly the Rattlesnake (jumps high) and Squitter the Spider (shoots webs to defeat enemies and create platforms). Glimmer the Angler Fish lights the way underwater while Clapper the Seal cools boiling hot water and turns water to ice to help you through certain areas.

Other new features include hidden gold coins and an alternating mode where gamers compete to finish the most levels in the shortest time. *DKC2* is just as gorgeous and just as fun as the original, helping keep the Super NES relevant the same year Sony's next-gen PlayStation hit stores. Also released for the Game Boy Advance.

Notable Quotable:

"Rare has made some amazing games over the years, and *Donkey Kong Country 2* on SNES still stands as one of its best. This follow-up to the smash hit *Donkey Kong Country* features better graphics, more perilous action/platforming, and introduces Dixie Kong, along with a great cast of other creatures you can play. Even the most hardened action/platform players will find themselves going bananas over *DKC2*." –*Game Informer* #100 (August 2001), which ranked *Donkey Kong Country 2* the 65th greatest video game of all time.

Insider Insight:

Along with the masterpiece that was *Super Mario World*, there was one other platformer that stood out as quintessential: *Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy Kong's Quest*. Even as a kid, I could tell that this game was special. The very first level establishes everything, from the small note that tells of D.K.'s plight to the shanty music to the massive ship that introduces the pirate theme. From that point on, the player is drawn into that world, on a fantastical journey to save D.K. from King K. Rool.

Unlike *Super Mario World*, which focused on completing the stage within a time limit, *Donkey Kong Country 2* lacks a clock, with each level piecing together to make a more coherent world. The trend of introducing a new concept and building on it is prevalent in *DKC2*'s level design as well. This makes the whole game flow as a true adventure.

I had two different versions of this game, one on the SNES and the other on the Game Boy Advance. In both versions, I got stuck on the hot air balloon level. For months I struggled to get further, instead becoming more and more familiar with the first part of the game. When I finally rode that hot air balloon to the end point, I screamed in victory. From that moment on, I was so excited that I played the game for a week straight until I finally beat it. It was a triumph that I struggle replicating even now and one I won't soon forget. –Alex McCumbers

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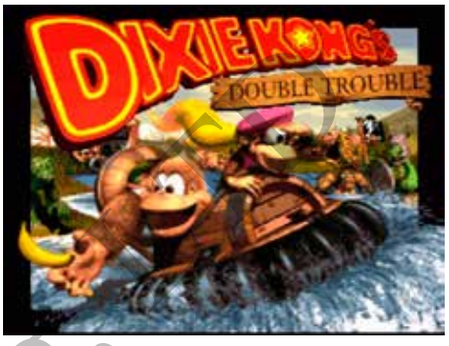
Donkey Kong Country 3:
Dixie Kong's Double Trouble!

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1996.



Dixie Kong and Kiddy Kong, who can do a rolling attack and pound the ground and break open doors to reveal secret areas, are off to find the missing Donkey and Diddy, who disappeared while celebrating their victory over King K. Rool. They must explore eight worlds: Lake Orangatanga, Kremwood Forest, Cotton Top Cove, Mekanos, K3, Razor Ridge, KAOS Kore, and Krematoa. *DKC 3* plays a lot like the first two games in the series, but there are some new features, namely the Brothers Bear. There are thirteen of these helpful bears throughout the game, including: Blunder, who gives out secrets; Barter, who swaps items; Barnacle, who runs the gift shop; and Benny and Bjorn, twins who run the ski lifts on the mountains. Also new to this series are Banana Birds, which help you save your progress.

The overworld map has been changed as well. Unlike the first two games, in which the maps offered straightforward access points, the map in *DKC3* has you renting a hovercraft and a motor boat from Funky Kong to explore lakes, find hidden caves, and look for the correct pathway to the next side-scrolling level. As in the first two games in the series, barrels play a significant role, acting as weapons, save points, access to higher areas, access to bonus rounds, and more. Finding the letters to spell out KONG for extra lives returns as well, as do rideable animal friends. Enguarde and Squitter return, joined by newbies Ellie the elephant, who can suck up water through her trunk to spray enemies, and Parry the Parallel Bird, who flies directly above your character and collects out-of-reach items.

Among many others, enemies to battle include: the springy tailed Re-Koil; Nibbla, the hungry fish; Buzz the bee; Sneek, the sneaky rat; the coin-protecting alligator named Koin; Bristels, the rolling hedgehog; and Swoopy, the sharp-beaked bird. Released more than two months after the Nintendo 64 hit store shelves, *DKC3* was ignored by certain gamers at launch, but it maintained the high quality of the series. The Game Boy Advance version offered a new world to explore: Pacifica. Followed by *Donkey Kong Country Returns* (Wii), *Donkey Kong Country Returns 3D* (3DS), and *Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze* (Wii U).

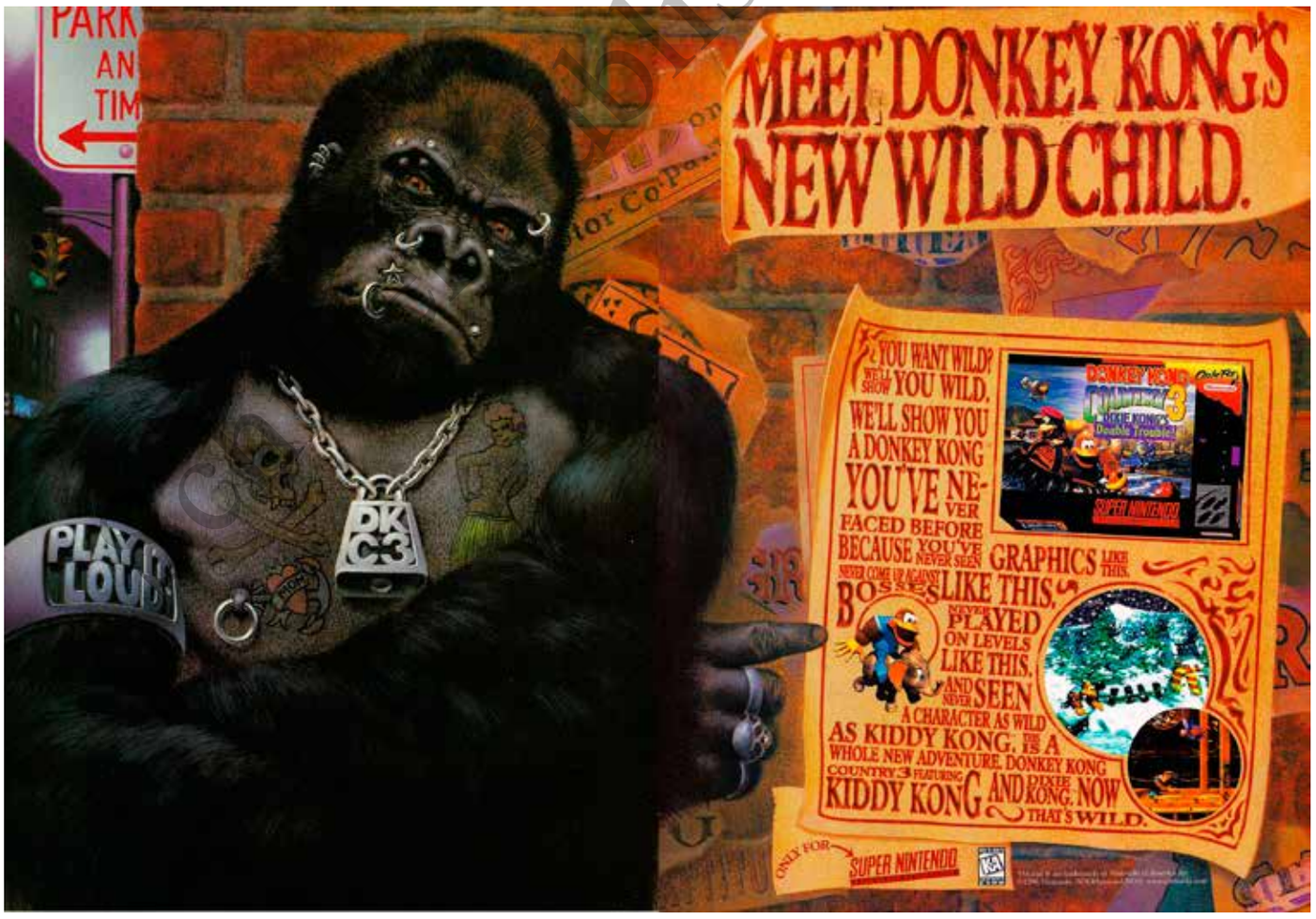
Notable Quotable:

"The controls are easy to pick up, as would be expected in a Rare game . . . Kiddy is one of the reasons *DKC3* gets so much flak from haters. They don't like the fact that Donkey could easily replace the kid, not to mention that not many people enjoy the prospect of dragging along an infant on any adventure. The rest of the reasons that crop up range from the repetitive plot to the lack of quality found in the soundtrack to the few appearances that the animal buddies make. The arguments in short: 'Rare changed it, now it sucks.' While it is a matter of preference, I have to disagree. *Dixie Kong's Double Trouble* is an excellent game, and although it may not be on par with *Diddy Kong's Quest*, it's still a great game in its own right. The graphic style may not be as 'real' as in previous entries, but it's definitely eye-catching . . . Rare tried out some new ideas to keep the game interesting and they succeeded to some extent. Getting everything is challenging, but like with any Rare game, it's worth coming back." –Awesome Canadian Gamers Ventcast (www.acgventcast.ca)

Sniffer Publishing, LLC

Insider Insight:
I remember first hearing about *Donkey Kong Country 3* in an issue of *Nintendo Power* magazine. The article was very short, but I kept revisiting it almost daily in anticipation of the game's release. I admit that I was not keen on the idea of a new Kong character being introduced, let alone a toddler, but that didn't keep me from buying the game at my local Toys"R"Us when it was finally released—I even got a free shirt for preordering the game. I spent lots of time during my final year of elementary school playing *DKC3*, trying to obtain every item and vehicle the game had to offer.

Swanky's Sideshow was a nice distraction from the adventure itself. I spent a majority of my time racking up bananas and bear coins, all by defeating Cranky Kong in a game you would find at a carnival. My favorite moment, however, was the first time I unlocked the gyrocopter. Having free travel around the Northern Kremisphere was worth the time and effort spent collecting all of the DK coins. *DKC3* is probably the least favorite of the three SNES games, but I will always remember it for being released around the time the SNES was on its way out. –Houston Bogus III



Prima Publishing LTD

Donkey Kong Country:

Blockbuster World Video Game Championship II

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Also known as the *Donkey Kong Country Competition Cartridge*, this special edition game was originally used for the Nintendo PowerFest '94 tournament, where it was employed as the final competition between the two remaining competitors, the winner of which was crowned the 1994 Nintendo World Champion. In 1995, it was used for the Blockbuster World Video Game Championship II. After that, cartridges were sold exclusively to subscribers of *Nintendo Power*. According to the back of the paper insert, Nintendo only produced 2,500 copies, making it hard to find and extremely valuable today.

Gameplay is similar to the first *Donkey Kong Country*, but a five-minute timer has been added that freezes the game when the clock runs out (the player's goal is to score as many points as possible within that limit). Only eleven levels are playable, eight of which are chosen at random each time. Levels include Jungle Hijinxs (Donkey Kong's Tree House and the Banana Hoard cave are inaccessible), Reptile Rumble, Ropey Rampage, Coral Capers, Winky's Walkway, Bouncy Bonanza, Orang-utan Gang, Snow Barrel Blast, Slipslide Ride, Ice Age Alley, and Croctopus Chase. The game begins at the first level, Jungle Hijinxs, where you are given fifty extra lives (as opposed to five). After you beat it, the action proceeds directly to the next level without showing the map. Another difference is that banana bunches replace animal tokens.

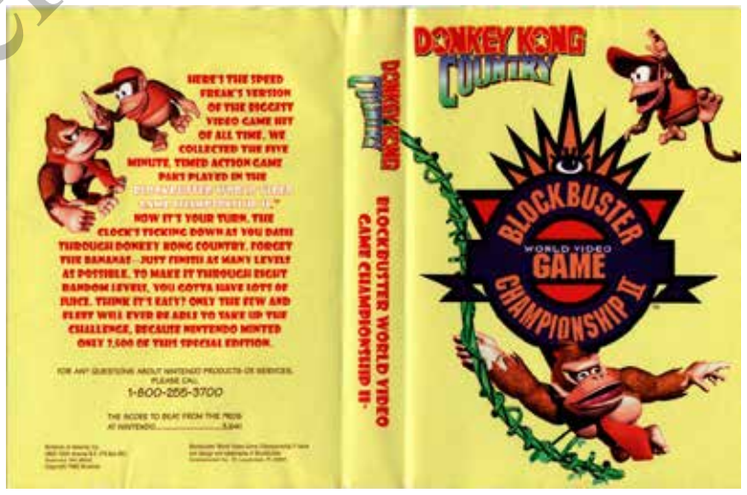
Notable Quotable:

"This version of the game was a relative no-frills affair: No title screen, no maps, just DK busting out of his jungle treehouse and getting right down to business. The player's goal was to get as high a score as possible within five minutes, and they were given a whopping fifty lives to do so. You'd get points for gathering bananas and bashing Kremlings, but the big scores came from reaching the end of the level. Once the time is up, the game freezes so the staff on hand can record your score, then it has to be reset.

"I worked to hone my craft, practicing the game as much as possible with a five-minute time limit, and managed to more-or-less perfect the first few levels; going through them was practically like one non-stop, smooth motion of running, jumping, and rolling. I was pretty well convinced I had it knocked, and it paid off—mostly . . . I was declared the champion in my age bracket for that store. In addition to a certificate, I also received a special card for 'a year's worth of free game rentals.' Unfortunately, the 'year's worth' only amounted to two free rentals per month—generally considered a rip-off by most anyone who has ever heard about it. I think there might have been some other bonus for winning, but that was the main thing.

"What got me, though, was that this was as far as I got. For years, I figured maybe whoever was in charge at that location was too lazy to send our scores in so we could advance to the next level of competition. As it turns out, that was apparently not the case. As I've only now discovered, as per Sega-16: 'The whole affair was much smaller than the first 'World Championship,' and 'there were no more state finals, and store champions wouldn't qualify for the next round unless they met a certain nationwide average.'

"I can only assume it was a rather tight average, but I guess I'll never know–and I still feel a little ripped off." –David Oxford (www.poisonmushroom.org), who won the *DKC* competition at a small-town mom-and-pop video store.



Sniffer Publishing LTD

DOOM

PUBLISHER: Williams Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: First-Person Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1996.

Plagued by choppy player movement, pixelated visuals, non-textured floors and ceilings, and slow gameplay, *DOOM* for the SNES is a flawed, though still impressive (considering the relative limitations of the hardware) port of Id's 1993 PC classic, which was written for DOS-based computers by John Carmack, John Romero, Dave Taylor, and Michael Abrash. The action only takes up seventy percent or so of the screen (thanks to an unadorned frame around the playfield), but a booming soundtrack, smooth strafing (via the SNES controller's shoulder buttons), and twenty-two levels of Hellish, shoot-'em-up mayhem make the game playable for those who don't own the PC version. The twenty-two levels are based on their computer counterparts, and the port includes all the original secrets, monsters, bosses, and weapons.

For the few of you unfamiliar with the game, *DOOM* is a prototypical first-person shooter, with players guiding an unnamed marine (who is supposed to be you) around a series of interconnected rooms, using a pistol (and your fists when ammo runs out) to battle scary creatures. You can pick up a variety of weapons, power-ups, and other items, including a chainsaw, a shotgun, a chaingun, a rocket launcher, a plasma rifle, armor, a backpack for carrying extra ammo, first aid kits for restoring health, computer maps, and more. The SNES uses a custom engine called the "Reality Engine," programmed by Randy Linden.

Thanks to memory limitations, the enemies are only animated from the front, meaning they always appear to face the gamer. The auto-map display uses the rotating and scaling of the SNES Super FX chip, with the entire map spinning around the player's position rather than the player being portrayed by an arrow. *DOOM* was ported to numerous other systems, including the 3DO, Game Boy Advance, Jaguar, and Sega 32X, the last of which disappointed with only fifteen levels. Sequels followed as well, and in 2016 the game was remade for the Xbox One and PlayStation 4.

Insider Insight:
Being an experienced gamer means people look to you for game recommendations. Through your expertise, your friends will only be guided to the crème de la crème of games to showcase their libraries. Of course, the only catch being you should have actually played the game. My friend, freshly settled with his late-to-the-party Super NES (circa 1995), asked me if I thought *DOOM* was any good. Though completely clueless about this port, but full of gaming veteran pride and saucer-eyed optimism I said, "Of course! It's *DOOM*!" Unfortunately, snappy soundtrack aside, he was met with a soggy translation chock-full of glitches, flat graphics, poor frame rate, a much lighter wallet, and a significantly dimmer view of my 16-bit counsel. But, hey … at least I saved myself sixty bucks!
–Chris Cavanaugh

Notable Quotable:
"It's hard to gauge just how big of an achievement it was to see *DOOM* running on the SNES if you weren't an avid and conversant gamer back when it was released . . . the SNES simply wasn't meant to be able to cope with the 3D texture-mapped environments *DOOM*'s engine spat out, and that's where it had to get a helping hand in the guise of the Super FX chip . . . for all its merits, the technical proficiency of the FX chip inevitably had its shortcomings, and invariably some minor aesthetic sacrifices had to be made. The resolution was dropped to around half, and the frame rate likewise—it chugged along at a solid and just-about playable 15 fps . . . *DOOM* purists then (and now) would argue that this wasn't a good conversion of their beloved FPS. It lacked some of the finer things the PC version had to offer, most notably the flick-of-the-wrist gameplay that a keyboard and mouse had to offer—knee-jerk reactions were a must when a sneaky imp clawed at your back, and lest I forget, for multi-player—something the SNES lacked. But all those things aside, it didn't matter. Sculptured had managed to port the same run-and-gun and nerve-inducing gameplay that made the PC original the classic that it's come to be. It even got one better over on its PC big brother by actually boasting a better and more booming orchestration of the game's soundtrack . . . *DOOM* on the SNES rocked. It made a man of your SNES and a boy out of its rivals. It was certainly a stinging jab to the eye of Sega's much-vaunted, supposed next-gen add-on, the 32X." –Steve a.k.a. Drunken Leprechaun (www.meanmachinesmag.co.uk)

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Doom Troopers:
Mutant Chronicles

PUBLISHER: Playmates Interactive.
DEVELOPER: Adrenalin Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Loosely based on the *Mutant Chronicles* pen-and-paper RPG, *Doom Troopers* puts you in the role of Mitch Hunter, who is armed with an assault rifle with rocket launching attachment, or Maximillian "Max" Steiner, who is armed with twin machine pistols and a flamethrower. These muscle-bound brutes can fire weapons, jump, climb (autoclimb can be turned on or off), grab, punch, launch special weapons, and perform close-attacks. By pressing the "R" shoulder button, you can aim your weapon 360 degrees. Both characters can collect power-ups, such as exploding fireballs for Max and homing missiles for Mitch.

The War on the Distant Planets you are involved in takes place on Mars, Venus (terraformed into a jungle world with raging waterfalls), Mercury (beware the lava), Pluto (penetrate icy caverns to locate and destroy reactor), and Nero (the tenth planet). For a 16-bit title, *Doom Troopers* is exceptionally (and comically) violent as alien enemies explode with blood whenever you destroy them. The game may appeal to *Contra III* fans (both offer two-player run-and-gun action), but it is clunkier and more frustratingly difficult than that gem. The SNES version has more robust sound than its Genesis counterpart, and there are some level design differences between the two.

Notable Quotable:

"I loved side-scrolling action games during the 16-bit era, and they were second only to RPGs as my favorite genre. But to an extent the pickings were a bit slim. After loving *Contra III*, *Hard Corps*, *Alien Soldier*, and the various 'Turrican' games, what was left were games of middling quality, especially by 1995. *Doom Troopers: Mutant Chronicles* aimed to fill that void but stumbled in the process . . . The controls are . . . unresponsive at times. What's worse than that is the idiotic decision to relegate aiming to a button . . . you have to hold a button down to aim in multiple directions, which is just plain stupid. It slows the game down considerably and forces you into positions where you might have to take a few cheap hits in the process of lining up a shot . . . hit detection and collision are not up to snuff . . . level design can be confusing as to whether certain areas will damage you or not . . . The game tries to mask its faults by providing a constant supply of health packs and extra lives . . . If it were not for the abundance of power-ups this would be an impossible game to finish . . . boss battles are creative and a highlight . . . I just wish there were more of them . . . The pre-rendered sprites are low resolution to the point where you can barely make out their design . . . The art direction is also highly derivative . . . With a little more polish, *Doom Troopers* could have at least been a good game with some rough spots." –Retro Game Age (www.retrogameage.com)

Insider Insight:

I was about twenty-one years late finding *Doom Troopers*. I didn't know anything about it until my friend Greg said, "Dude, you need to buy this game now. It's a great game, and the price is amazing." Greg saying that stopped me in my tracks. In all the years I have known him, he has suggested many games, but now he was actually *telling* me to buy one. Based on that alone, I bought it, and I'm so glad I did!

Doom Troopers is a crazy run-and-gun title, but I never saw a game that lets you shoot the head off someone, and they can still shoot you. And wow, it is so hard: blood everywhere, bullets that come from everywhere, and landscapes that have multiple levels. After my first play-through, I immediately called Greg and said, "Bro, this game is awesome. It is crazy-hard at times, but I just can't stop playing." He just laughed and said, "Told you so."

The best part is that *Doom Troopers* was unknown to me for so many years. This means there are other games out there waiting to be discovered and played. If some of them are as much fun as this one, I have a lot to look forward to. Sometimes friends can show you things that you never knew, even if you have been gaming for years. That's what our community is all about: helping each other find amazing games like this and sharing our favorites. –Barry Shank

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Doomsday Warrior

PUBLISHER: Renovation Products.
DEVELOPER: Laser Soft.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

In the tradition of *Street Fighter II* and *Art of Fighting* comes *Doomsday Warrior*, which separates itself from the 2D fighting pack by letting winning players add to their various powers, such as how quickly your fighter can recover hit points, how strong their punches and kicks are, and how much life they have. The post-apocalyptic storyline focuses on the Doom Squad, a group of seven warriors brainwashed into working for an evil sorceress to destroy Earth. One warrior, the character you select, breaks free of this control and battles the other warriors, along with bosses Ashura: "Right Hand of Evil," a four-armed fire-wielding giant; Main: "Magical Lord," an evil wizard; and Shadow: "Left Hand of Evil," a clone of the character you're controlling.

Each playable fighter can pull off various punches, kicks, throws, and aerial moves, along with one or two special moves. Said playable fighters include: Sledge: "Hero of Earth" (dashing punch, blue fireball); Layban: "Military Deserter" (dashing punch, shooting star); Amon: "Heavy Metal King" (flying body press); Daisy: "Dancing Plant" (dashing flip kick); P-Lump: "Fat Bomber" (ground fire, flying head-butt); Grimrock: "Dizzen Lizard" (ceiling smash, lightning bolt); and Nuform: "Living Liquid" (fireball spit). If the fighting action is too difficult for your tastes, you can reset to Easy, but this mode lacks passwords for saving progress and upgrades.

Notable Quotable:

"While the game has a good soundtrack, some cool backgrounds, and a small but generally distinctive cast, what really sets it apart are the controls. Unlike the standard set by *Street Fighter II*, you have to hold down a button to block, and there's a jump button as well. Two other buttons are used for punches and kicks, with variations made possible by holding up (or down while in the air) as you attack. Special moves in this game are done with charge motions. The power and range of these special moves is determined by how long you charge the move, which lets players effectively feint by performing the fastest but weakest iteration of a move to get closer to an opponent . . . Like in many fighting games, you can throw an opponent by holding towards the opponent and pressing an attack button while right next to them. These are powerful and cosmetically dramatic as well, with anime-inspired motion lines filling the screen followed by a quick explosion sound as one character slams another into the ground. Executing throws ends up being the easiest way to quickly defeat an enemy . . . The animation and graphics are just average, but the actual design of the backgrounds are fairly good. Some have many layers of parallax scrolling, others are more static but are in cool settings like on the side of a building instead of a rooftop or one set on a series of small hovering platforms . . . In general, *Doomsday Warrior* is poorly balanced as a fighting game and will quickly get boring for many players." – Chris Rasa (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Insider Insight:
Doomsday Warrior was one of those games I always wanted when I was a kid but was never able to get my hands on. The box art was rad, with that superhero martial arts dude jump-kicking Mad Max rejects in the face really grabbing me. Flash forward to a couple of years ago; I'm surfing eBay and come across a complete copy of it for relatively cheap. My childhood yearning to play the game instantly came flooding back, and I immediately clicked the "Buy it Now" button. If only the game had lived up to that awesome box art, but it was disappointment central. It's such a horrible, nearly unplayable fighter with broken controls, sluggish pacing, and annoying music. A little part of me died the night I finally played this turd. –Christopher Pico

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Double Dragon V:
The Shadow Falls

PUBLISHER: Tradewest.
DEVELOPER: Leland Interactive Media.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Double Dragon V deviates heavily from previous games in the classic beat-'em-up series by offering ten different characters for use in a series of one-on-one, *Street Fighter II*-style fights. Each character can do light, medium, and hard kicks, along with such moves as jump, flip forward, crouch, crouch defend, crouch attack, and throw. Playable characters, each of which also has a special move, include: Billy Lee (dragon shock), Jimmy Lee (dragon fire), Blade (torpedo), Bones (gunshot), Countdown (missile shot), Icepick (Iceball), Sekka (claw roll attack), Jawbreaker (flying headbutt), Sickle (energy blade), and Trigger Happy (rocket uppercut). Sub-boss Dominique, who has a whip and knives, and final boss Shadow Master, who wields a scythe, are playable by entering a code.

Fighting locations include: Dragon Dojo Interior, Dragon Dojo Exterior, Cody's Nutron Grill, Metro City Sewer System, Dusty's Garage, Chemical Factory, Fusion Plant Interior, Fusion Plant Exterior, Metro City Hotel, Shadow Dungeon, Shadow Dojo Exterior, and Shadow Dojo Interior. There are four modes of play. In Tournament mode, you play a series of computer-controlled opponents, each of whom has his or her own ending. Vs. Battle is one-on-one action against another player. Quest mode has a storyline, while Watch mode lets you pit two computer-controlled characters against one another. Based on the *Double Dragon* animated series, which ran for twenty-six episodes from 1993 to 1994. The SNES version of *Double Dragon V*, which was the follow-up to *Super Double Dragon*, looks and sounds a shade better than its Genesis counterpart. Followed by such games as *Double Dragon Advance* (Game Boy Advance) and *Double Dragon IV* (PlayStation 4), the latter of which features an 8-bit art style similar to the NES Double Dragon trilogy.

Notable Quotable:

"The game has a more cartoonish look than *Street Fighter II* and less polished graphics, but it is attempting to emulate the rather poorly drawn style of the cartoon . . . makes full use of a 16-bit palette and has well-drawn backgrounds with surprising depth. Flowing waterfalls, snorting dragon heads, moving flames, and other animations accentuate the levels. There are even cameos from the cartoon such as the Dragon Cruiser. There are no destructible objects, though, so you won't be knocking your opponent through barrels or into another section of the level. The biggest problem with the graphics is that they just feel too choppy, as if the frame rate is too low. The characters don't move as smoothly as they should . . . The comical impact sounds are unremarkable, and the music feels too generic . . . Leland should have attempted to reproduce the cartoon's music for the sake of unity . . . Whereas *Street Fighter II* utilized charging attacks (such as holding back and then pressing forward) and sliding attacks (such as sliding the control pad from down to forward), *Double Dragon V* relies upon a strange variation where you hold the control pad one direction and quickly change directions. Example: for Jimmy Lee's air attack, you hold forward for two seconds then press down and punch. Any attempt to slide the control pad from forward to down will botch the movement. It's an unnatural motion that will throw off gamers already used to *Street Fighter II*'s general control scheme . . . The game features decent hit detection, responsive controls, a fair balance, and a reasonable character lineup. Unfortunately, it does nothing to add to the tournament fighter genre." –Double Dragon Dojo (doubledragon.kontek.net)

Insider Insight:

If there's one genre that I love over any other it's the once-popular scrolling beat-'em-up. Having grown up in and around arcades, one of my favorite titles was the original *Double Dragon*. It was Technos' masterpiece that put the genre to the forefront, inspiring hundreds of clones and several sequels in both the arcades and on home systems. So having already snapped up the previous Double Dragon games on home systems, I couldn't wait for this fifth installment, especially after having played the excellent *Super Double Dragon* (the fourth game) on the SNES previously.

So imagine my horror when *Double Dragon V* finally arrived, and it was a *Street Fighter II*- inspired one-on-one fighter! This wasn't *Double Dragon*; this wasn't representative of the game I played in the arcades all those years before. Where is Abobo? Why do Jimmy and Billy Lee have weapons? Who is this weird skeleton guy? I asked these questions and many more. I tried desperately to find something to like about *Double Dragon V*, but it was just horrific.

A bit of research soon told me that the game was based on a cartoon series that I wasn't even aware existed. Having now watched the cartoon, I can say it was every bit as awful as the game, so I suppose they kept *The Shadow Falls* pretty faithful. Please don't be fooled by the name like I was—this isn't truly a Double Dragon game, just a horrific memory. –Kieren Hawken

Scuffer Publishing LTD

Dragon: *The Bruce Lee Story*

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Virgin Interactive Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1–3 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

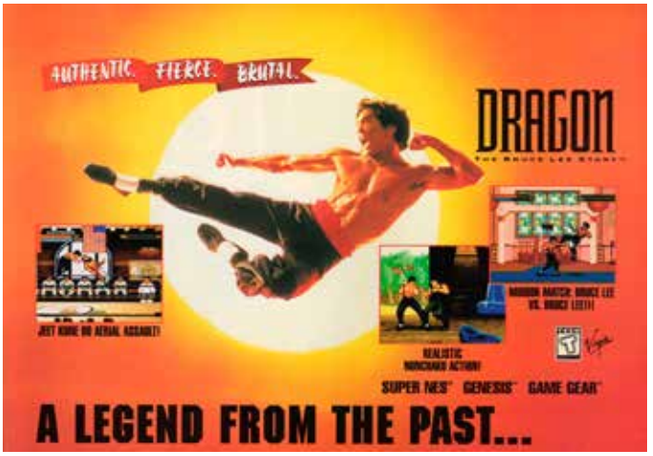
Inspired by the 1993 biographical film, which starred Jason Scott Lee in the title role, *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story* casts players as the famous martial arts legend (unfortunately, there are no other fighters to select from). Armed with more than thirty-five different fighting moves (including crouching punch, double kick, diving chop, grab, and throw), Lee must pummel his way through a series of fights against a variety of foes (sometimes two at once), including a kickboxer, a chain-wielding sailor, a chef bearing two meat cleavers, and a pair of staff-wielding women.

Fighting well builds up Lee's Chi, giving him the ability to whip out nunchuks. Stages include: Lantern Festival 1961; San Francisco 1964; The Seattle Gym; Oakland, California 1964; Film Set; Bruce's Kwoon; Long Beach, California; "The Big Boss" Film Set, Pak Chong, Thailand 1970; "Enter The Dragon" Set; and Final Stage, where you must battle The Phantom, a samurai who can do a double walking kick and a warp and slash maneuver.

Story mode lets players punch and kick through key scenes from the movie while multi-tap adapter compatibility allows up to three players to duke it out at once (the other two players control clones of Lee differentiated by pants color). In two-player mode, gamers can compete or team up against the computer. The Jaguar version has smoother animation but lacks a three-player option. Also released for the Genesis. The Game Gear version is a platformer/beat-'em-up game. The Master System rendition wasn't released in the U.S. Bruce Lee also appeared in *Bruce Lee: Quest of the Dragon* for the Xbox.

Fun Fact/Sad Fact:
A master of Jeet Kune Do, Bruce Lee starred as Kato in the TV series *The Green Hornet* (1966–67). He also starred in such films as *The Chinese Connection* (1972) and *Fists of Fury* (1972). Sadly, he died shortly before the release of his best-known movie, *Enter the Dragon* (1973). He was only thirty-two.

Notable Quotable:
"Mediocre sprites, animations, and backgrounds provide the visuals, but don't expect to see blood. Decent martial arts music carries the audio, but the fight sounds are lame. Fans of the film may want to rent *Dragon*. All others should stick to the fighting legends of the gaming world." –*GamePro* (February 1996)



Insider Insight:
Born in San Francisco, Bruce Lee became an international star and martial arts sensation in the late '60s when cast as Kato in *The Green Hornet*, and his action films were shown in syndication for decades to come. This is where I first discovered the awesome fury of Bruce Lee, watching "Kung Fu Theater" with my dad on lazy weekend afternoons.

So of course I had to play *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*, which loosely follows the semi-fictionalized plot of the film on which it is based. Indebted to classic fighting arcade games like *Yie Ar Kung Fu* and *Kung Fu Master*, the game was widely criticized upon release for failing to bring anything particularly new to the genre. *Dragon* faced overwhelmingly negative reviews for its limited moves, lackluster soundtrack, and weak graphics, but I think the game's legacy is greater than the sum of its arguably average parts.

I mean, seriously, you get to play as Bruce Lee! Even without an arsenal of special moves or a yellow tracksuit costume variant, that's pretty rad, and his bone-crushing finishing moves and signature scream are super fun. You get to fight sailors, knife-wielding chefs, rival martial arts instructors, and all sorts of deranged bad guys. The story is half-baked, and the plot barely keeps pace with the real-life drama, but the gold-framed film stills and swirling fonts are totally spectacular.

Dragon also takes it to the limit by adding a "Chi" meter that charges up for furious attacks, multiple fighting modes (nunchuks for the win!), and three-player battle. The game also incorporated Lee's philosophy of Jeet Kune Do, a technique that inspired many fighting characters, including Maxi in *Soul Calibur* and Fei Long of *Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers*.

Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story may be flawed, and it may feature a final boss that is nearly impossible to beat, but it has stood the test of time to become an underrated and influential fighter in kung fu gaming history. Fight! –Van Burnham

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

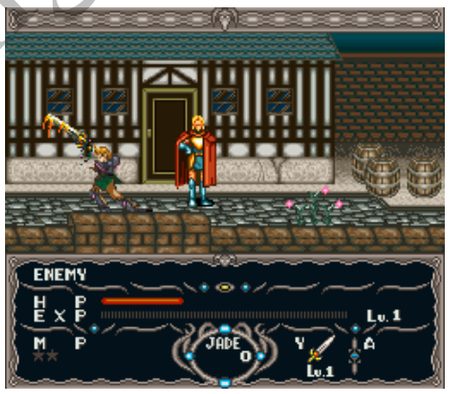
Dragon View

PUBLISHER: Kemco.
DEVELOPER: Kemco.
GAME TYPE: First-Person/Third-Person Role-Playing Game/Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

The superior prequel to the critically drubbed *Drakkhen*, *Dragon View* (sometimes called *Drakkhen 2: Dragon View*), like its progenitor, has players navigating a 3D overworld (containing mountains as boundaries) from a first-person point of view. During the combat scenes, however, the action switches to a side-view perspective, with players, as Alex, walking, jumping, swinging a sword, and acquiring and using such weapons as a bow and arrows and a boomerang-like device called a Hauza. Defeating enemies grants experience points. Leveling up increases offensive and defensive character stats, while finding special items can increase hit points and magic points. You can find magical rings and weapon upgrades as well. Areas to explore include dungeons, deserts, caverns, ruins, swamps, snowy mountains, and towns. Known as *Super Drakkhen* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:
"Yet another interesting twist on the RPG/action theme—this one presents more direct combat sequences in addition to the first-person traveling sequences. The action sequences themselves are particularly well done." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Although *Dragon View* sports several views and intricate game play, it falls short of breaking any new RPG ground. The hit points, experience levels, magic points, and weapon changes of standard RPGs are here, but you'll yearn for the days of yore . . . and maybe some good old-fashioned, monster-bashing, *Might and Magic* action." –*GamePro* (October 1994)



Scarfet Publishing

Dragon's Lair

PUBLISHER: Data East.
DEVELOPER: Movietime Limited.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1993.

Notable Quotable:

"It is perhaps one of the most vile and reprehensible things in the history of gaming that a game as genuinely important as *Dragon's Lair* would have its name besmirched by a game like this . . . It's a different game . . . that would be fine if it were a good game, or even an okay game . . . It's like a platformer for people who have never played a platformer . . . The platforming mechanics are so floaty and so broken . . . You have this huge, lanky sprite, and he animates like a five-year-old flipping pages in a notebook . . . This is not a pretty game . . . There are only a handful of different level types that just keep repeating over and over and over." –CGR Undertow (YouTube)

Like the NES version, *Dragon's Lair* for the Super Nintendo is a side-scrolling, fully controllable, action-based, raster graphics version of Cinematronics' laser disc arcade game (1983), which was an interactive cartoon with timed button presses. In the arcade original, Dirk the Daring's only weapon was a sword, but here he also wields daggers, axes, and shurikens for vanquishing the various monkeys, bats, dragons, snakes, spiders, and other enemies. Dirk must run, jump, swim, crouch, and climb his way through twenty-four levels filled with a variety of obstacles, including storm clouds, volcanoes, flames, and pits, in order to rescue Princess Daphne.

Helpful items along the way include rope, anvils, springs, weights, and seesaws. Unlike the SNES version of *Space Ace*, levels aren't loosely patterned after their coin-op counterparts. In addition, scrolling is not forced, and combat is far more pervasive (*Space Ace* consists primarily of jumping over chasms and dodging alien attacks), making for a more playable (though still flawed) game. This is essentially a poor man's—make that a desperately poor man's—*Castlevania*.

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Insider Insight:
My imagination has been held captive by *Dragon's Lair* since the summer of 1983, the first time I saw the game in an arcade. I was immersed in a cartoon featuring the jaw-dropping animation artistry of Don Bluth—it was unlike any other game I had ever played. At that moment my dream of becoming a professional baseball player was over, as all my efforts focused on bringing *Dragon's Lair* home, like Ricky Stratton, the spoiled rich kid from *Silver Spoons* who had his own arcade machine.

At the age of ten, I was Dirk the Daring. I made a sword of wood and spray-painted it silver with a golden hilt. My friend and I would create *Dragon's Lair* obstacles in my basement, loosely mimicking the gameplay. As he chucked a soccer ball at my head, I would dodge the "Giddy Goon" on my quest to rescue Princess Daphne. This was as close as I could get to playing my favorite game outside of an arcade.

Ten years later, at the age of twenty, I remember seeing Singe the Dragon on the SNES box art and feeling the weight of that wooden sword in my hand. I rented the game not knowing anything about the gameplay. I was finally able to bring Mordroc's Castle home. I popped it in and—ouch! It was a repetitive, clunky, frustrating platform version. The opening scene had depressing music criminally resembling John Carpenter's score to *The Fog*. (Compare it for yourself sometime; it's a total rip-off!) This was not the *Dragon's Lair* I knew.

Looking back at it now, the SNES game should have been a major disappointment, but I freaking loved it! I think it was the familiarity of the characters that made me blind to the glitches. Seeing those cool snakes with the orange and white stripes, along with the Black Knight and the Lizard King again was awesome! I never really thought about how lame it was that when Dirk jumped in water, instead of swimming, he would crawl inside a giant bubble and float around. I was just happy to be wielding the sword again, and this time without dodging any real projectiles. I played for hours that night. I had to get to the dragon, just to see what it was like.

I never did reach the dragon, and I'm okay with that. Revisiting *Dragon's Lair* on the Super Nintendo brought me back to being ten years old again, seeing the game in the arcade for the first time, and trying to bring home that magic somehow. Though the SNES game was nothing like the arcade, I still remember it fondly. Say whatever you would like about the SNES version, but be warned, I will forever defend it with my gold-and-silver sword. –Sean Tiedeman

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Drakkhen

PUBLISHER: Kemco.
DEVELOPER: Kemco/Seika.
GAME TYPE: First-Person/ Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

Your mission in *Drakkhen* is to retrieve eight magical gems in order to break the spell of the evil dragon kings, thus saving the Drakkonian people and their kingdom. When the game begins, you create a party of four characters, male or female, from four classes: amazon, scout, magician, and princess. Attributes include power, agility, intelligence, knowledge, and physique. While you explore the first-person-view outer area (an island), which is polygonal, non-textured, and flat in appearance, Mode 7 rotation and scaling is used to decent effect. Random battles occur, in which your party of four (which you can now see in third-person) moves around the screen, hacking away at the monster in question. Characters can be controlled one at a time during battles, but you only guide their movements, not their weapons.

Once you are inside a dungeon, battles are set in place, and you go from room to room, talking to characters, grabbing and buying items (keys, health, rings, and staffs that have magical powers), casting spells (heal, light, resurrection, speed, etc.), and solving puzzles (such as triggering a drawbridge by leveling up a character to gain the unlock spell). Weapons include dagger, bludgeon, dragon sword, bow and arrow, and saber, among others, and there are various types of armor and shields. The first RPG for the SNES, *Drakkhen* was adapted from the 1989 computer game.

Notable Quotable:

"The storyline of *Drakkhen* was pretty dull. Saving the world from dinosaur overlords may not be an overused plot, but the story just didn't hold together. You get a vague impression of the situation every once in a while, but the entire story in the game could be told in five minutes. That leaves you with a game that consists of walking across a multi-colored island and killing one enemy after another. People rarely talk to you, and most of the conversation consists of directions and encouragement . . . Kemco went out and explored the shaky territory of 3D special effects so that we could eventually have such games as *Donkey Kong Country* and *Super Mario RPG* for this mighty system. However, this trip cost them the life of a game that could have been done much better. *Drakkhen* was an experiment, not an investment, and the people at Kemco killed something that could have been good. (I don't think it could have been great. I mean, let's be realistic here.) Even with this handicap, this game helped me waste a few days, so overall, *Drakkhen* gets a sixty-nine percent." –RPG Fan (www.rpgfan.com)

Insider Insight:
It was December 25, 1991. I saw a large, suspicious-looking box sitting beside the Christmas tree. I waited until all the other presents had been opened before making my move. My Uncle Doug, who always knew exactly what I wanted, sat on the couch behind me, a knowing grin on his face. As I slowly peeled back the wrapping paper, I noticed a mostly black box and the words SUPER NINTENDO emblazoned in red across the bottom front of the package. I was stunned, exhilarated, and in disbelief. I now owned a Super Nintendo Entertainment System!

Once I got over my shock, my uncle handed me another, smaller box. "The guy at the game store told me this one is unbelievable!", he said. I tore into it with glee and discovered a downright frightening-looking image consisting of a giant, menacing dragon, a bloody altar with stone pillars around it, and a pile of bones, no doubt the remains of a menagerie of unfortunate souls. The name on the box was "Drakkhen."

Drakkhen was my introduction to the RPG genre. Although, like most kids at the time, I started with the irresistible pack-in game, *Super Mario World*. But as I played I kept staring at the unopened *Drakkhen* box sitting next to my SNES. The allure of this strange and frightening-looking game began to pull at me. So, somewhat reluctantly, I popped it into the console and was greeted by the same menacing scene that graced the front of the box, recreated beautifully in detailed pixel art. The scene was accompanied by dark, ominous music that sent a chill up my spine.

I didn't get far in *Drakkhen* that first time. In fact, I became so frustrated with the absence of direction, random enemy attacks, pseudo 3D environments, and my complete and utter lack of understanding of the game, I turned it off. I didn't return to *Drakkhen* for an entire year. At the age of twelve, I just didn't understand the RPG genre, and it took another, more straightforward game by the name of *Final Fantasy II* to make me realize what I was missing. It enabled me to view *Drakkhen* in an entirely new light, and I ended up loving the game.

Drakkhen has stuck with me all these years later because it's an incredibly atmo-

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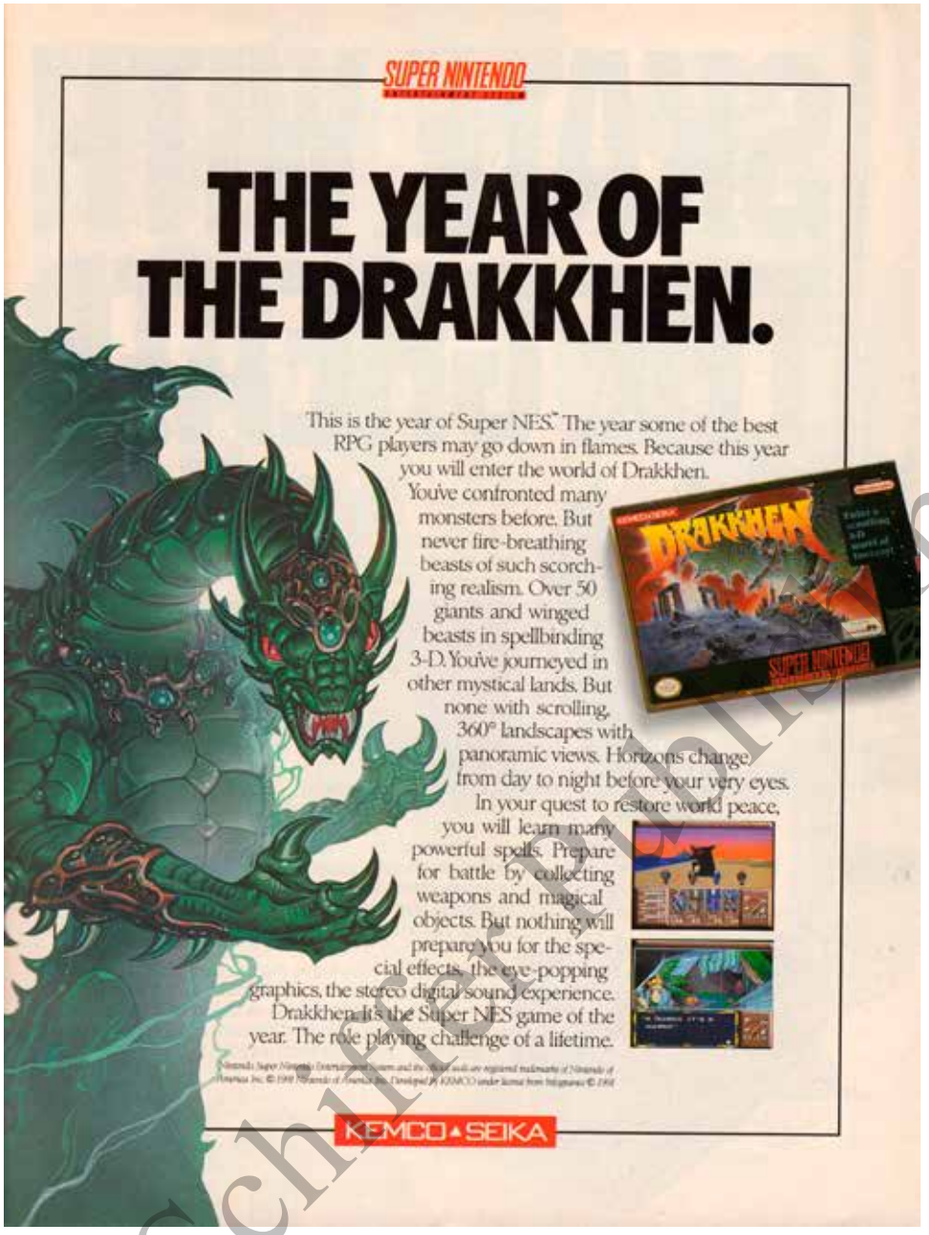

spheric experience—every facet of the game seems like a dark mystery. Its ambiance drew me in, despite the fact that the storyline is an incomprehensible mess. But that didn't matter, because there was a mystery around every polygonal corner. You could be walking through the open plains at night, when lo and behold a constellation comes to life and annihilates your entire party. See a graveyard on the horizon? Be careful . . . bump that gravestone and the giant severed head of a demonic-looking hellhound will appear, howling its unabated fury at your unsuspecting minions. Is that a shark fin in the moat of that castle? Try crossing the bridge when it's in sight, and you'll be chomped down to bits before you can even blink. *Drakkhen* is filled with these sorts of brutal but mysterious and awesome touches.

Mystery and atmosphere aren't the only things intriguing about *Drakkhen*. Frankly, it's a fairly solid RPG, albeit an extremely dated one. In a post-2000 world where RPGs are as much about action set pieces as they are about collecting loot and improving your character stats, I find it hard to recommend a decades-old, slow-paced grind of a game. What *Drakkhen* does have going for it, if you have a bit of patience, is that it's built on a solid foundation. All the usual "fun" RPG tropes are there, but surrounded by a lovely darkness and atmosphere that many other games simply do not possess. When I'm playing *Drakkhen*, not only am I doing my best to level-up and improve my characters, I'm also exploring a large, open world that is full of strange curiosities. Imagine venturing to the deepest depths of a dank, mossy dungeon, only to find yourself face to face with a giant, wingless dragon. It's terrifying and wonderful at the same time.

If I'm looking at this without the rose-tinted glasses of nostalgia, it would be hard to recommend *Drakkhen* to a younger demographic that didn't grow up with this sort of plodding and limited gameplay. That being said, the game held up for me personally when I played through it recently. I had a blast exploring its murky dungeons, walking its variable terrains, and soaking up the cryptic atmosphere the game projects on the player. If you can be patient, forgiving, and a bit open-minded, *Drakkhen* will provide, at the very least, an admirable and unique RPG experience. –Zack Smith

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Dream T.V.

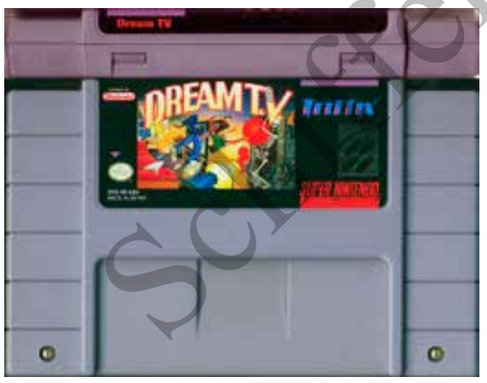
PUBLISHER: Triffix Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Rollogame Ltd.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Hampered by awkward gameplay, sluggish controls, and boring battles, *Dream T.V.* forces one or two players to guide a pair of characters—Charlie and Jimmy, who run, jump, and climb—through an alternate dimension filled with cavemen, falling rocks, mutant monsters, pits, skeletons, and other enemies and obstacles. You must search for nine puzzle pieces in each labyrinthine level, and there are different types of keys to pick up for opening specific doors. When the characters get separated, semi-confusing split-screen action kicks into gear, but you can switch to full screen and focus on one character. One-player games are especially irritating since you must switch back and forth between controlling Charlie and Jimmy. Some gamers will appreciate that you use the characters in tandem at times, such as employing a seesaw to propel one kid up onto a higher platform.

There are a variety of weapons to brandish (including arrows, lasers, and axes) and vehicles to use (including hover boards, jet packs, and a spaceship), the graphics have nice detail, and the cooperative gameplay and puzzle-solving elements show potential, but the game is not much fun at all. Plus, the music is annoyingly repetitive. The best thing about *Dream T.V.*, which offers four themed Dream Worlds to explore (Medieval, Egyptian, Prehistoric, and Future), is a special potion that lets one player hitch a ride in the other character's pocket. Similar to (but not as good as) *The Lost Vikings*.

Notable Quotable:

"The outlandish story is what grabbed my attention first: Two video game masters receive a mysterious cartridge in the mail, and when they begin to play, it sucks them into a zany video game world! The poorly written and overly wordy introductory dialogue intrigued us, but it's the gameplay that made us vow to play this game until we beat all four clichéd levels . . . The primary thing that makes this game fun is randomness. Random things happen, and it's funny. We eventually tracked down a manual, but it was actually fun to experience the game with no prior knowledge of the items and goals . . . I think it's safe to say that the general opinion of this game is probably negative. But in the 'so-bad-it's-good' genre, *Dream T.V.* is second to none." –GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)



Scanner Publishing

The Duel: *Test Drive II*

PUBLISHER: Accolade.
DEVELOPER: Distinctive Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports Car Racing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

The sequel to *Test Drive*, the 1987 computer game, *The Duel: Test Drive II* lets players select from a Porsche 959, a Ferrari F-40, and a Lamborghini Diablo, each customizable in the following ways: auto-shift on or off, car height (perspective of the road), drag coefficient (wind resistance), brake coefficient, acceleration coefficient, maximum g-force (tire traction), and scrub rate (how much speed your car will lose while skidding). In addition, there are four courses: Desert Blast (straight roads, few off-road objects, all daylight), City Bound (slightly more winding road, more off-road objects, one section in the dark), East Coast (more winding road, more off-road objects, half of the route must be driven in rain or darkness), and West Coast (rain, snow, darkness, winding roads, lots of off-road objects), each identifiable by mediocre background scenery.

The view of the racing action, which is the top half of the screen, is from the cockpit, and players can see the rearview mirror, speedometer, dashboard, steering wheel, tachometer, gear shift, and radar detector, the latter of which indicates when you should slow down to the speed limit (or, you can try to outrun the state trooper). It is also important to stop and refuel at gas stations and avoid running over roadside obstacles. Players can race against the clock or a computer-controlled car. You begin with five lives and lose a life each time you crash, blow an engine, or run out of gas. Based on the 1989 computer game, the SNES version of *The Duel: Test Drive II* looks and plays better than its Genesis counterpart.

Notable Quotable:

"*Test Drive II* is playable, which is something that other envelope-pushing games on the SNES struggle with . . . The game runs much smoother than it has any right to, and the controls are stiff but not terrible . . . it's awesome that the cars are real models . . . Each car has a different dashboard, too! Another nice touch is the weather effects that affect how the cars handle and add some much-needed variety to the four sets of races . . . ambitious and impressive in many ways. But I wonder how much of my enjoyment of it was based on it being categorically better in every way to the abysmal *Race Drivin'*?" –Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)

Insider Insight:

I first experienced *The Duel: Test Drive II* when it came out on that quintessentially British computer, the Sinclair ZX Spectrum. Being a huge fan of both cars and driving games, I salivated over the reviews in magazines, which were promising a truly realistic driving experience like no other. I begged my dad to buy it for me, and he soon sent off a check to our favorite mail order company, Castle Computers, as I waited by the mailbox. Truth be told, he was a huge fan of driving games himself, and I think that is what swung the purchase.

After deriving an enormous amount of fun from the game, I offered to do a swap with a friend at school for a while, as you did back then. Having deposited my copy of *Test Drive II* in my locker that morning, I was distraught to find out come lunchtime that my locker had been broken into and the game stolen. I was even more upset to later find out who did it—one of my closest friends—although he would never admit it.

To this day, my friend's betrayal brings me much pain, but I did get the chance to buy the game again a few years later when Accolade released it in a much improved form for 16-bit machines. I was pleased, as this new rendition was excellent, offering even more realism than the 8-bit Spectrum version. –Kieren Hawken

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Dungeon Master

PUBLISHER: JVC.
DEVELOPER: FTL Games.
GAME TYPE: First-Person Action Role Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Based on the popular Atari ST computer game from 1987, *Dungeon Master* offers twenty-four different characters called "champions," each of whom can advance in any class (ninja, priest, fighter, and wizard) by repeatedly using skills related to that class. Players select their party of one to four champions and proceed to explore a dungeon, solve puzzles (including flipping switches), use keys to open doors, battle monsters, and confront an evil sorcerer named Chaos. Battles take place in real time (you click on the opponent to attack), and spell-casting involves combining magic runes or symbols into a complete spell. Each champion's health, stamina, and mana (magical energy) are monitored, and each champion has various levels of strength, dexterity, wisdom, vitality, anti-magic, and anti-fire, all of which can be improved upon during gameplay. An inventory screen shows details about each of your champions, along with their weapons and other items. There is no auto-mapping system, meaning graph paper is essential.

Dungeon Master was produced for a number of computers, but the SNES version is the only one that has an introductory sequence. The SNES cart also features music during the game. Similar to *The Bard's Tale*, *Wizardry*, and *Eye of the Beholder*. Followed by *Dungeon Master II: Skullkeep* (Sega CD).

Fun Fact:
Dungeon Master was the best-selling game of all time on the Atari ST and won numerous awards, including the first-ever "Special Award for Artistic Achievement" from *Computer Gaming World* magazine.

Notable Quotable:
"I remember this being a spectacularly good game when I used to play it six years ago on my Atari ST, but the Super NES version is a disappointment . . . abysmally slow . . . The game takes about a second to respond to the controls so you have to learn to 'program' sequences of directions and get used to waiting while commands are carried out. But while

the programming leaves much to be desired, the strength of *Dungeon Master*'s design saves it from total failure. The 3D graphics, the clever puzzles, the way the characters improve as you go, the flexible inventory system, the way you can check around corners for nearby monsters that chase you around the corridors as soon as they get a whiff of you, the ever-dimming light, the whole vastness of the dungeon—all the features that made it so great six years ago are still here." –*Nintendo Magazine System* (April 1994)

Archive Publishing

EarthBound

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Ape Inc./Hal Laboratory.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

As the title suggests, *EarthBound* takes place on our home planet (or at least a strange version of our planet), as opposed to a medieval fantasy world or cyberpunk dystopia. You begin the game as a brave, ball cap-wearing, baseball bat-wielding boy named Ness, who has vowed to save Earth from the evil Giygas aliens. These loathsome beings have enveloped the world in hatred and turned animals, humans, and various objects into malicious creatures. As you travel from place to place, you'll add three friends to your party: frypan-carrying Paula, who has powerful psychic abilities; Jeff, a mechanical genius who uses weapons he repairs; and Poo, a mysterious prince from the East who has great physical, mental, and spiritual strength.

The foursome you control explores such areas as villages, cities, caves, deserts, and dungeons. Along the way, they'll engage in first-person, turn-based battles against such quirky enemies as Runaway Dog, Skate Punk, Titanic Ant, Ramblin' Evil Mushroom, Mondo Mole, Zombie Dog, Bad Buffalo, and Chomposaur. During each battle, you can attack with weapons (different types of bats, frying pans, guns, beams, slingshots, and yo-yos), use a special ability (fire, flash, freeze, hypnosis, paralysis, etc.), use an item (rockets, bombs, slime, snakes, and the like), or try and escape. The party receives experience points for victories, and if a character acquires enough experience points, he or she will level-up. If you encounter a weak enemy after your characters have built up a lot of strength, that enemy might be defeated instantly.

The graphics in *EarthBound* are cute and cartoonish, separating the game from such similar titles as *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy III*. Unfortunately for those wanting an original cartridge, it's in high demand, making it very expensive in the collector's market. The sequel to the Japanese game *Mother*, *EarthBound* is known as *Mother 2* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"Almost every 'quirky' Nintendo game released after 1995 seems to have some tonal or thematic link to *EarthBound*. It seemed to play a major role in forming the company's narrative identity . . . sends the message that the real world was just as compelling and extraordinary as any fictional world you could dream up, and it sent that message with a decidedly irreverent comedic bend. It was a wildly risky departure from convention, one that paved the way for many of the franchises that we take for granted today . . . It's a simple-looking game about children . . . Like many of Nintendo's best properties, there is plenty for kids to enjoy in *EarthBound*, but it's not a 'kid's game' . . . a reflection upon childhood from an adult's perspective. The game has been compared many times to *Catcher in the Rye* and works of Maurice Sendak . . . the children are the genuine, selfless heroes and the adults are the ridiculous, misguided, hubris-laden fools, caught up in classism, selfish ambition, and immaterial goods . . . *EarthBound* does not look impressive, but the game's unified melding of music, writing, and visual design is masterful . . . the last hour of *EarthBound* has had me thinking for years about my relationship with video games, victims of child abuse, the meanings of evil, heroism, religion, and life in general." –Jonathan Holmes (www.destructoid.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*EarthBound* is one of the strangest, most charming games ever made. This role-playing classic was equal parts satirical send-up and impassioned love letter to the American culture, presented through a decidedly Japanese filter. *EarthBound* is beloved for its unique setting, standing in stark contrast to the usual

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fantasy settings of role-playing games at the time. The bright and quirky take on modern-day life and the creepy sci-fi elements that are slowly introduced into the game were novel at the time, and remain one of gaming's most unique settings. *EarthBound* was also notable for its themes and story. On the surface, the colorful and whimsical world seems to present a lighthearted tale of four children on an adventure to save the world; but dig a little deeper, and one would find a complex and, at times, dark tale about abandonment, loss of innocence, and the struggles of growing up. While these themes are subtle and are mostly delivered in a palatably lighthearted way, their inclusion into the story and dialogue are noticeable. This made *EarthBound* a truly unique RPG that pushed into territory few games have covered since." –Digital Trends (www.digitaltrends.com), which ranked *EarthBound* the 6th best SNES game.

Insider Insight:
When I was around nine years old my mom, dad, and I went on a family vacation, and during that time my aunt was taking care of our home. Upon our return, I noticed a HUGE, colorful box on our kitchen counter. On it was a strange gold robot, accompanied by text that read "EarthBound." It was a gift from my aunt!

I could write essays on why *EarthBound* means so much to me, but in a nutshell it is the most special video game I have ever played. When I was in elementary school, *EarthBound* allowed me to explore vast cities, strange towns, deserts, and swamps. It let me go shopping, buy freakin' pizzas whenever I wanted, see concerts, and live my life without boundaries. No other video game had allowed me that sort of freedom. It was basically an adult simulator—which now, doesn't sound so fun—but *EarthBound* is just as special to me now as it was when I was a child.

From the names of its enemies (Master Barf, anyone?) to its eccentric dialogue, I have yet to play a video game that harbors the charm and quirkiness of *EarthBound*. It's truly one of a kind. –Brittney Brombacher

Insider Insight:
Back in September of 1995, Sony's inaugural PlayStation console was all the rage among gamers, but for those of us who weren't quite ready to give up our sprites for polygons (or had the money to pony up for a new system), we had a plethora of great titles still showing up for the Super Nintendo. One of my favorites during this time was *EarthBound*. The sheer weirdness of the game really made a lasting impression on me. I mean, a game where you have to do things like rescue a Blues Brothers cover band from debt or get homesick to the point where it affects your battles? Sign me up!

It's really a shame *EarthBound* didn't get the love it deserved back when it was first released, because the sheer number of unique concepts it introduced was staggering. My favorite of these was the rolling hit point counter: the simple fact that your hit points would roll off your total like an old-timey gas pump saved my bacon on many an occasion. Enemies turning tail and fleeing from you because you were too strong was hilarious—there was more than one occasion I found myself yelling at the TV, "Come back here, coward!" I recently repurchased *EarthBound* for my Nintendo 3DS and was glad I hadn't played it since my first run-through because it gave me a chance to rediscover all the wonderful oddities the game holds. "Say fuzzy pickles!" –Thor Thorvaldson

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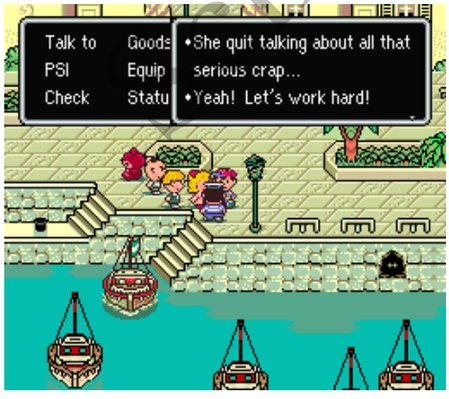

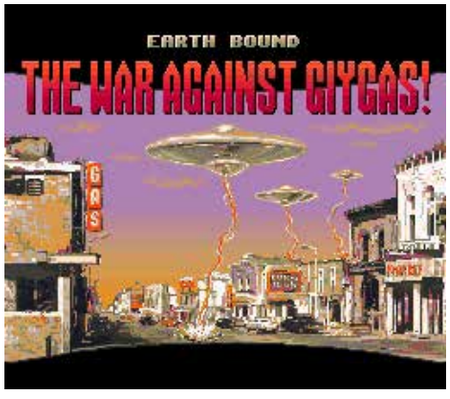

Earthworm Jim

PUBLISHER: Playmates Interactive Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Shiny Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Highly popular when it was new in stores, *Earthworm Jim* holds up nicely today, thanks to offbeat humor, colorfully detailed visuals, smooth animation, Tommy Tallarico music, zany sound effects, and hardcore gameplay. The title character, an earthworm donning a man-sized spacesuit, uses a rapid-fire Plasma Blaster to blow away pesky crows and hamsters, along with such memorable foes as Major Mucus, Peter Puppy, Professor Monkey for a Head, and Evil the Cat. He also climbs steep cliffs, dodges flying saucers, braves the fiery pits of hell, battles evil lawyers, launches a cow, engages in a bungee jumping battle over a pool of snot, and much more.

Blaster ammo is limited, but Jim can pull himself out of his spacesuit and use his wormy body as a whip. Levels include New Junk City, What the Heck?, Down the Tubes, Snot a Problem, Level 5, Andy Asteroids (third-person racing action down a tunnel), For Pete's Sake, and Buttville. The SNES version has lens flare effects, more color, and multiple layers of parallax scrolling, but it lacks the Intestinal Distress level found in the original Genesis rendition. Further, the Genesis game is faster and has tighter controls and more voice samples. Also released for the Game Boy, Game Boy Advance, and Game Gear. Enhanced for the Sega CD as *Earthworm Jim: Special Edition*, featuring a new world, a new introduction, a new weapon, and other flourishes.

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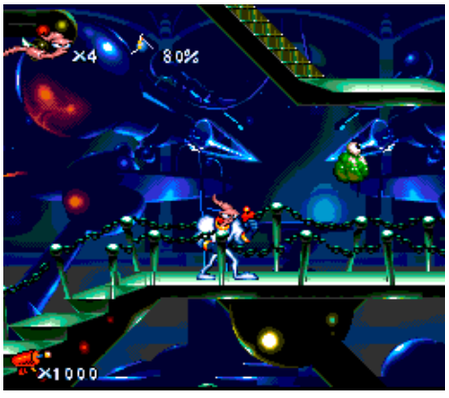


Insider Insight:
Some gamers might write *Earthworm Jim* off as a kind of bad-attitude knockoff of *Sonic the Hedgehog*, but I think the game deserves all the praise it gets. While an earthworm with a robotic power suit has a sort of built-in, smirking sense of humor, the game's grander ambitions really set it apart. With the animated style of characters, bosses, and backgrounds possessing a kind of frenetic, Chuck Jones feel, it really has a lot to look at as you whip and shoot your way through levels. And cleverness abounds in large and small ways—the goal of saving "Princess What's-Her-Name" and other nods proved that *EJ* was also a clever send-up of the clichés and tropes of that era's action games.

While *Earthworm Jim* will probably always be seen as a Sega Genesis product, the game really shone on the SNES. It also was one of the first games that got me thinking about the craft of character design. The characters and overall art direction of *EJ* were so unique and powerful, with their hand-animated look really bringing something different to the table for the SNES. That translated into sequels, action figures, and a TV series. Not bad for a guy without any arms or legs! –Tim Lapetino

Insider Insight:
In the early '90s, I wasn't even ten years old yet, and I was already obsessed with anything bizarre and grotesque, which set the stage for my interest in *Earthworm Jim*. I was the weird girl who stared at *The Tick* comics while everyone else was talking about dreamy Jonathan Taylor Thomas. Cartoons like *The Ren & Stimpy Show* and *Beavis and Butt-Head* were moving works of art that I recognized were not meant for young audiences like me to appreciate, but somehow that made them all the more appealing. I even collected *Beavis and Butt-Head* trading cards and *The Simpsons* scratch-and-sniff cards so I could study the drawings more intently.

When my friend told me he had a new SNES game even more awesome than *ToeJam & Earl* for the Genesis, I told him he was an ugly liar. Nothing could possibly be more awesome than my favorite game, which had stolen my life and permanently burned into my parent's TV screen. Then I fell in love with *Earthworm Jim*, even before I heard his name burped out at the start of the game. He had the groovy personality of Ash from *Evil Dead*, the abs of a Street Shark, and the mildly nauseating charm of the Toxic Avenger. Plus, he launched cows into the sky, which I saw as an homage to the Arrogant Worms and their song "Cows with Guns," just another obscure connection to strengthen my infatuation with *Earthworm Jim*.

He would never replace my first loves, ToeJam & Earl, but Earthworm Jim and I rescued Princess What's-Her-Name a few times just to watch that ungrateful Jessica Rabbit wannabe get squished by the cow. I still view the game as a wonderful embodiment of my youth: struggling to fight evil in a world where nothing quite makes sense and everything is seemingly random until it all crashes down to prove that the end isn't always what you expect, but if a worm in a robot suit can still get the crown, there is hope for us all. –Krystle-Dawn M. Willing

Super Retro Publishing LTD

Earthworm Jim 2

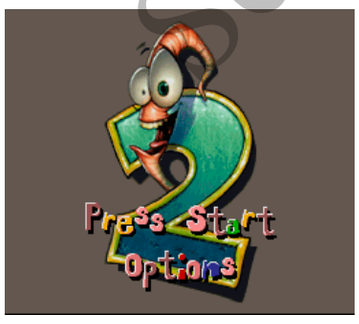
PUBLISHER: Playmates Interactive Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Shiny Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

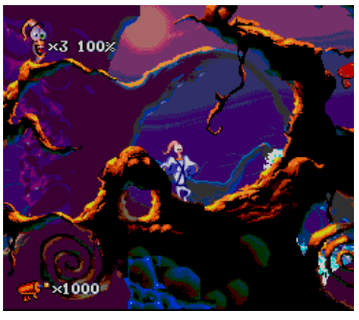
Earthworm Jim 2 features the same type of surreal, absurdist humor found in the first game, but mixes things up by incorporating a variety of new gameplay elements and more types of guns. In addition to platforming and shooting, Jim must now: blast his way through an underground maze; avoid exploding sheep while working his way through intestinal passages as a weaponless blind cave salamander; avoid light bulbs, sharp objects, and Evil the Cat while floating upward via his inflated head; answer nonsensical game show trivia questions; take cows to a barn; and bounce falling puppies to safety. Jim is now accompanied by Snott, a sentient mucus creature who acts as a swinging tool (replacing the whip swing) and a parachute (replacing the helicopter head).

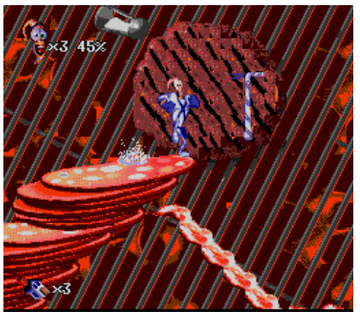
New weapons include: barn blaster (destroys everything onscreen), homing missile, bubble gun, and 3-finger gun (shoots three-way bullets). Levels include: Anything but Tangerines, Lorenzen's Soil, Puppy Love, The Villi People a/k/a Blind Sally, Circus of the Stars, The Flyin' King & Peter Pain (an isometric shooter level where you fly a "pocket rocket" and avoid and shoot cannonballs, homing missiles, and "flying sumo/Roman centurions"), Cow Abduction, ISO 9000, Level Ate, and Cupid's Cathedral. Plus there's a secret bonus level the manual warns that you may never see: Totally Forked. Like the original, *EJ2* is hilarious and has excellent graphics, sounds, and gameplay, but some complain that it deviates too much from the original. Also released for the Genesis, Saturn, and Game Boy Advance. Followed by *Earthworm Jim: Menace 2 the Galaxy* (Game Boy Color) and *Earthworm Jim 3D* (Nintendo 64).

Insider Insight:
Earthworm Jim 2 struck a creative chord with me that resonates to this day, even as I'm now more than a decade into my own career as a game developer, and it remains one of my favorite 16-bit titles of all time. The game's level of creativity and originality was mind-boggling, and the outright insanity of the IP was pure genius. I was in junior high when the game originally released and, aspiring to be a game artist myself, I was completely enamored with the game's visual artistry. I remember how amazing it (and its predecessor) looked in motion. The Tommy Tallarico soundtrack was icing on the cake and is still one of my favorite game soundtracks of all time.

I remember buying copies of gaming magazines just so I could cut out the full-page *Earthworm Jim* ads and hang them on the wall. I never really had the pocket money as a kid to buy my own games very often, so my friends and I lived off of rentals. *Earthworm Jim 2* was probably my most rented title during the SNES days. We used to laugh so hard at the game's relentless humor, but we were totally engaged, likewise, in its solid gameplay. For me, it seemed like a real improvement on the original, being a lot smarter about balancing the art style's eccentric visuals versus accessibility and challenge, with much more readable environments and gameplay mechanics, addressing a lot of the first title's frustrations. –Kale Menges







Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Eek! The Cat

PUBLISHER: Ocean Software.
DEVELOPER: CTA Developments.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Inspired by the Fox Kids cartoon, which ran from 1992 to 1997, *Eek! The Cat* is a challenging, puzzle-ridden platformer with an unusual gameplay mechanic. The title character can take infinite damage, but he must keep the tagalong character safe as he journeys through such areas as Misereek, Eek vs. The Flying Saucers, Halloweek, Bearz 'N The Hood, and It's a Wonderful Nine Lives. Among other missions, you must rescue Annabelle from aliens, reunite Pierre with his Squishy Bear brothers, save sleepwalking granny from zoo animals, and catch Joey the orphan's runaway Christmas present.

To keep the character walking along with Eek safe from harm, you'll perform such acts as pushing him (or her) out of harm's way, pushing him so he will go faster in order to leap over gaps, reaching across gaps to let him walk safely over Eek, and stopping him so he won't plummet to his death. Eek, who also pulls switches and claws enemies, moves quickly as he runs, jumps, and otherwise makes his way through the game. Sometimes compared to *Lemmings*, but with only one character (at a time) to keep safe, *Eek! The Cat* was patterned after the 1993 computer game, *Sleepwalker*.

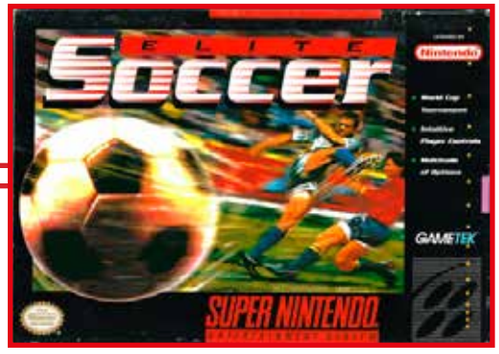
Notable Quotable:

"Graphics are average, but the gameplay is quirky and colorful enough to capture the essence of the show. Levels feature a number of characters from the show, and mostly bland gameplay consists of completing tasks and solving simple puzzles to advance. A two-player mode might have saved this title from the litter box." –All Game Guide (formerly allgame.com)

Scrapper Publishing LTD

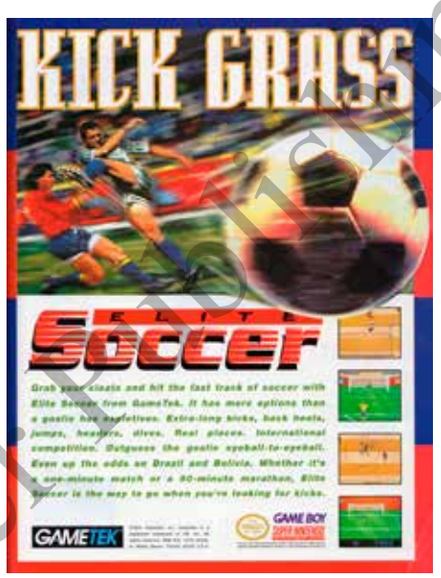
Elite Soccer

PUBLISHER: GameTek.
DEVELOPER: Rage Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



Featuring a tilted overhead view of a scrolling vertical field, *Elite Soccer*, which was published as *World Cup Striker* in Europe and Japan, is the similar-looking and -playing sequel to *World Soccer '94: Road to Glory*. Players can perform a wide variety of moves, including power kicks, overhead kicks, diving headers, throw-ins, sliding tackles, corner kicks, free kicks, and more. The game features twenty-four international teams that qualified for the 1994 World Cup (which was played in the U.S.), plus eight teams that failed to make the cut.

Game modes include: Practice, Friendly Game, World Cup, World Championship (knockout tournament), Special Cup (mini league of super teams), World Tournament, World League, and Six-a-Side (indoor soccer). Options include match length (one to ninety minutes), pitch surface, team editing, formations, wind strength, referee ability (from poor to tough), and more. The goalie can be controlled by you or the computer, which has three selectable skill levels. Followed by *Striker Pro* for the CD-i, *Striker: World Cup Special* for the 3DO (only in Europe), *Striker '96* for the PlayStation and Saturn, and *Striker Pro 2000* for the PlayStation and Dreamcast.



Notable Quotable:

"The neat new features are something to look forward to. This is actually an okay game, but the players on the field move like flies! Their movements are too quick to handle. This odd movement kind of takes away from the gameplay value. Sounds are up to par, but not that overwhelming. This one is alright, but not outstanding." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1994)

Insider Insight:

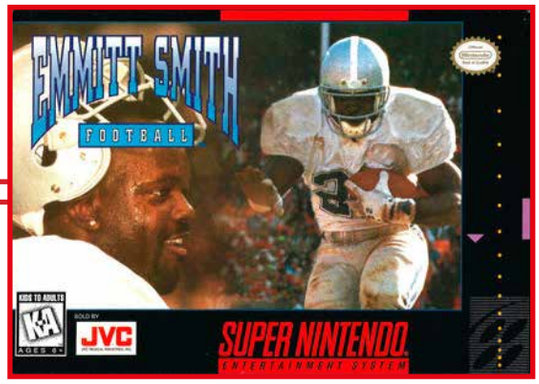
Also known as *World Cup Striker*, *Elite Soccer* is an update of the 1992 Atari ST and Commodore Amiga title *Striker* by Rage Software. This was the second update of that game to appear on the SNES after *World Soccer '94: Road to Glory*. When the original *Striker* first hit the market, it had a huge task on its hands: to uproot the mighty *Kick Off 2* and *Sensible Soccer*. While it didn't quite take them out, it did sit nicely alongside them, offering some cool differences and more arcade-styled action. While the other two games took on an overhead view, *Striker* chose to introduce a new way to play the beautiful game. It used a tilted perspective from behind the player with the pitch scrolling around you, which allowed you to judge the height of the ball as well as the direction.

It's the multi-player aspect of this game that brings back one of the funniest memories from my youth. My younger brother Duncan was playing the game against my neighbor John as I watched on as spectator. Then suddenly John fouled Duncan in his own box with the score at 1-1. As it was right on the penalty spot, he was awarded a free kick. But my brother totally confused him by yelling PENALTY! My neighbor then turned the player around and booted the ball into his own net to score in his own goal. This not only lost him the game, but heavily bruised his ego; he became the butt of jokes for many years to come. –Kieren Hawken

Scholastic Publishing, LTD

Emmitt Smith Football

PUBLISHER: JVC Musical Industries.
DEVELOPER: NCM Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.



Endorsed by Dallas Cowboys superstar Emmitt Smith, who provides such encouraging voice samples as "That was beautiful," this game lacks NFL and NFLPA licensing, meaning teams and uniforms are generic. After selecting two teams (city names only), you challenge the computer or a friend as the home team or visitor. You can also select quarter length (five, ten, or fifteen minutes), Exhibition or Season mode, and fair, rainy, or snowy weather conditions.

After the coin toss, it's time for the kickoff. A power meter lets you judge how hard to kick the ball, and there are onside kicks. A special Play Editor lets you design and save more than sixty different *Madden*-like plays. You can let the computer control your quarterback or take the reins yourself. Special color-coded markers enable you to keep track of receivers that are far up field. Switch control to the receiver when necessary to catch the ball. When running the ball as a receiver or a running back, you can dive, shoulder-block, spin, and sidestep to shake off defenders. While on defense, you can move the player you are controlling anywhere you like, but be careful not to cross the line of scrimmage before the ball is snapped. Pressing "B" switches to the player closest to the ball while "Y" executes a dive in the direction you are heading. You can change viewpoints while the game is in progress and during replays. The angled overhead action scrolls vertically.

Memories:
I've always been a Dallas Cowboys fan, especially during the Roger Staubach/Tony Dorsett era of the 1970s. When Jerry Jones bought the team in 1989, firing the legendary coach Tom Landry in the process, I was skeptical at first, but the team eventually won me over with their excellence. With Emmitt Smith in the backfield, they won three Super Bowls (1993, 1994, 1996), and Smith went on to break the all-time NFL record for rushing with 18,355 total yards. While his SNES game may only be mediocre, Emmitt Smith remains one of the greatest football players of all time.

Notable Quotable:
"Emmitt makes a good training camp for 16-bit football. However, for hardcore players, *Madden Football*, *NFL Quarterback Club*, and *Super Tecmo Bowl* offer better-looking, faster games—with NFL licenses to boot. For the first time in his career, Emmitt Smith is a second stringer." –*GamePro* (October 1995)

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Equinox

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Software Creations.
GAME TYPE: Isometric Action Role Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

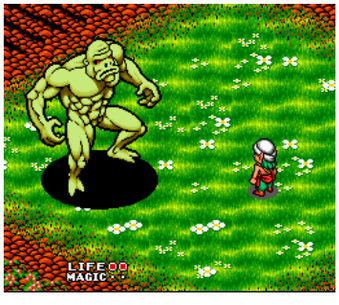
The sequel to *Solstice* (NES), *Equinox* casts you in the role of the son of Shadax (the hero in the first game), who has been kidnapped by an evil witch. To rescue him, you must explore the labyrinthine, spike-strewn, 3/4-view dungeons beneath a fantasy world, battling demons, grabbing keys to open doors, and collecting tokens (twelve per dungeon) to summon the following bosses: Bonehead, a giant skull; Sung Sung, a creature who throws rocks; Quetzalcoatl, a living statue; Pincha, a giant crab; Dollop, who spews balls of slime; Eyesis, a giant spinning pyramid; and Billy Bones, who shoots exploding cannonballs. The world of *Equinox* is comprised of seven kingdoms: Galadonia (your home), Tori (forest), Deeso (desert), Atlena (man-made villages supported by wooden platforms), Quagmire (swamp), Afralona (ocean, mountain range), and Death Island (frozen isle).

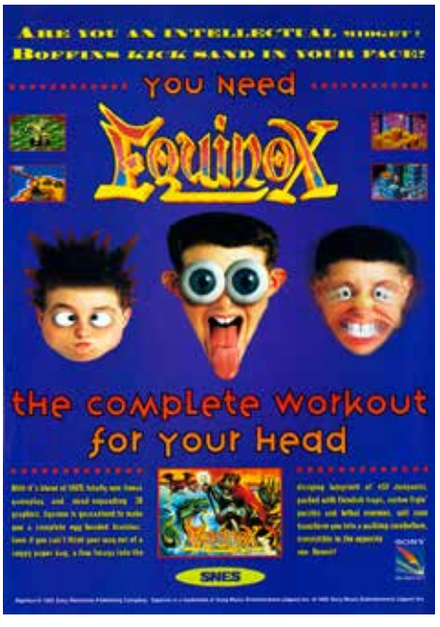
During your journey, most of which takes place underground (though there is an above-ground map to navigate, where you access the dungeons), there are weapons to collect (dagger, axe, sword, shuriken, twindagger, scimitar, mace, and twin sword, each of varying strength and speed) and magic spells to find that can freeze enemies, heal the player, unlock all the doors in the room without using keys, zap all the enemies in the room, and more. Bricks play a crucial role and appear in many puzzle-inducing forms, including sliding, conveyor belt, pushable, floating, invisible, and exploding. Apples increase your life energy while potions increase your magic energy. You can even jump and play a harp.

A colorful, meticulous, and unusual title, *Equinox* will reward patient gamers.

Notable Quotable:

"Much-improved sequel to the NES game . . . Although *Solstice* was an intriguing concept, I felt it was executed poorly . . . *Equinox* proves that the same basic concept, when done correctly, can result in a rewarding game experience . . . the dungeon graphics are bold, brilliant, and very colorful. The characters, objects, and enemies (especially the bosses) are all very large. The animation of your little Arabian Knight hero is flawlessly fluid . . . variety is just as important as quality, and in that regard, *Equinox* does not disappoint . . . Every dungeon is unique . . . the more I played, the more I slowly began to appreciate the game's soundtrack. Equinox eschews catchy theme songs in favor of long, ambient compositions. Usually, when you first enter a dungeon, you'll hear an airy piece of music that plays for a bit then fades to silence. Eventually, the music will loop back to that piece, but there is a long section in-between where you'll hear ominous (and very realistic) sound effects, such as doors creaking, footsteps, bubbling water, and even snoring! This creates the feeling that the game world is alive and draws you into it . . . *Equinox* is addicting because no matter how difficult something may be, I knew that I could eventually overcome it. I just had to know what lies beyond the next door . . . the game is huge (the final dungeon has one hundred rooms), but there were always just enough new innovations and challenges for me to keep playing." –Flying Omelette (www.flyingomelette.com)

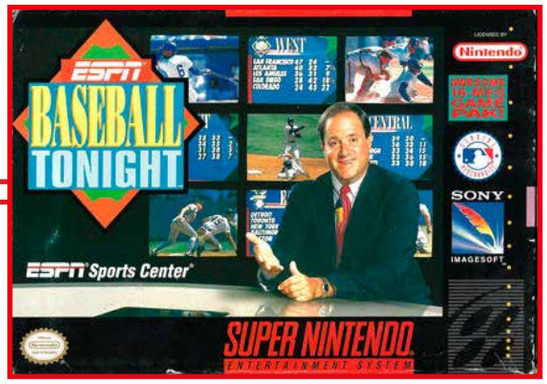




Offset Publishing, LLC

ESPN Baseball Tonight

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Park Place Productions.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



As with most hardball games of the era, *ESPN Baseball Tonight* offers a behind-the-batter perspective. However, when the ball is hit into play, the view does not switch to overhead—the screen simply scrolls quickly to the left or right to show where the ball went. The game uses its ESPN license to decent effect, boasting *Baseball Tonight* theme music and the digitized voices of Chris Berman and Dan Patrick. The twenty-eight MLB team names (including the expansion Colorado Rockies and Florida Marlins) are real, but player names are not. Exhibition, Practice, and Home Run Derby modes are available, but stats cannot be saved, and there is no season mode. Passwords save Playoff progress.

Thousands of frames of motion-captured animation were employed to make player movement look as authentic as reasonably possible on a 16-bit system. Despite its slow pace, the game is arcade-like in nature. Scoring is typically high, players can move the ball after a pitch, and there's not much in the way of simulation features. Also released for the Genesis and Sega CD, the latter version boasts a 162-game season, all twenty-eight Major League stadiums, and ten minutes of video highlights.

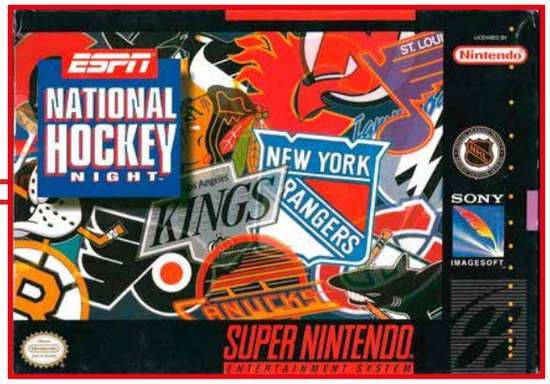
Notable Quotable:

"The color scheme in *EBT* is bright and expansive . . . the real logos on the team selection screen look sharp. On the field the grass is a believable Kelly green, and the dirt looks freshly tilled. However, the players' uniforms are a drab gray . . . Your eyes will be distracted by how startlingly fluid the player movements are when pitching and swinging—in fact it's almost movie-like. Unfortunately, the players look awkward in all actions other than pitching and hitting . . . The game indeed has a unique appearance, but your time is much better spent playing *NBA Hangtime*, a much more successful effort by Russel Shanks and the team at Sony Imagesoft. Where's a difficulty setting when you need one? The Home Run Derby is impossible, and the normal gameplay mode is far too easy to be respectable. How a baseball game from the mid-'90s can get away without a season mode, I don't know; Then again maybe the programmers realized no one would want to stick out a lengthy season with such an inefficient A.I. engine." –SNES HUB (playingwithsuperpower.com)

Sniffer Publishing, LLC

ESPN National Hockey Night

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Park Place Productions.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Hockey, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



While it sits in the shadow of the great *NHL '95*, *ESPN National Hockey Night* is nevertheless a worthwhile representation of the icy sport. Not only does it boast the highly unusual option of two viewpoints (horizontal and vertical, selectable during gameplay), it offers a variety of other features and options, including: poke and body checks; penalties on or off; three period lengths (five, ten, and twenty minutes); commentary from ESPN's Bill Clement; and various game modes, including Exhibition, Playoffs, and Eighty-four-game Season.

The NHL Skills Challenge features Fastest Man, which has players speeding around the rink, and Shootout, in which gamers compete for the highest scoring percentage. Battery backup lets players save options, stats, and season progress. The game has large, nicely rendered players (represented by position and number, but not name), which were created (at least in part) by using more than 2,000 frames of motion-caption animation. Multi-player adapter compatibility allows up to four armchair athletes to hit the ice at once. Also available for the Genesis, Sega CD, and Game Boy Color. A PlayStation 2 game of the same name was also released, with announcing by Gary Thorne and Steve Levy and endorsement by Jaromír Jágr.

Notable Quotable:

"It boasts crisp graphics and excellent audio. I love seeing that ESPN logo and hearing the classic musical theme . . . On the SNES the vertical configuration employs scaling to give you a better view up the ice. It's visually appealing but your lateral vision remains very limited, making it hard to pass . . . the animation becomes really choppy whenever the puck changes possession. The sideways view offers a vantage point similar to *Blades of Steel* for the NES, but it's not that great. I didn't feel like I could aim my shots in this view . . . The body check control is assigned to the same button as shoot, which can cause you to accidentally fling the puck the length of the floor . . . The audio is arguably the highlight of the game, with lively organ music that lets you get into the spirit. I also get a kick out of that angry digitized referee who gets up all in your face . . . *National Hockey Night* ranks high in presentation, but the actual hockey could use some work." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:

ESPN National Hockey Night was my introduction to America's most recognizable hockey theme song.

But let's back up a bit.

When I was growing up in Canada during the 1990s, there were two melodies that every Canadian knew by heart: "O Canada" (the Canadian National Anthem) and the theme to *Hockey Night in Canada*. It was as if the opening tune to that hockey broadcast was programmed into my head at birth. Epic and insanely catchy, the song gave me goosebumps when I heard it on TV, knowing that the Saturday night hockey game was coming up next. As a kid, I just assumed the world knew this song. I also assumed the entire world watched hockey (spoiler alert: they don't!).

The hockey video games of choice for me at the time came from EA Sports: it started with *NHLPA 93*, and, of course, *NHL 94*. (In 2016, we conducted an "Ice Madness" tournament with MSG Networks to crown the greatest retro hockey video game of all time; unsurprisingly, *NHL 94* won by a mile.)

One day I went to a friend's house and, for the first time, saw *ESPN National Hockey Night*. My first question was, "What's ESPN?" (Remember, I was twelve and living in Canada, where we didn't have that channel.) The team logos were all over the cover, so that was enough for me to try it. We put the game in, and immediately the opening song played—it was great.

At first, a part of me got a little defensive: how could there be ANOTHER great theme song associated with hockey? This game should have the *Hockey Night in Canada* theme! That's the definitive hockey song! This is a travesty! (I wasn't using words like "travesty" at twelve years old, but you get my point.)

My concerns were squashed when we actually played the game and realized it wasn't all that great. The graphics weren't horrible, but the controls were counterintuitive and made the overall gameplay experience a lot worse. *NHL 95* came out around the same time and really eclipsed this game. But *ESPN National Hockey Night* did introduce me to another iconic hockey theme song, and today I'm thankful for it. –Arda Ocal

Sonnet Publishing, LTD

ESPN SpeedWorld

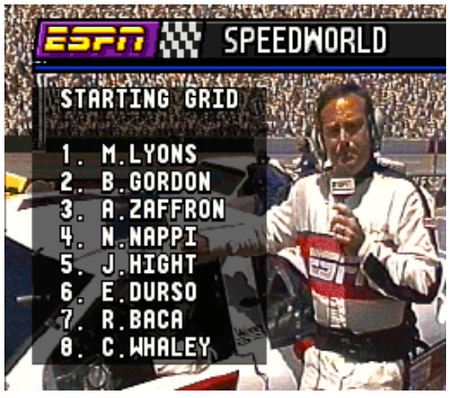
PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Park Place Productions.
GAME TYPE: Sports Car Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Featuring an interactive pit crew, 3D rendered graphics, and commentary by ESPN's Jerry Punch (who appears via full-motion video and offers hints and advice), *ESPN SpeedWorld* is NASCAR-style racing in which players drive a stock car on road courses, short tracks, and super speedways (there are five different tracks for each type of raceway). After a qualifying round, the action kicks into top gear as gamers race against twenty-three computer-controlled cars, with speeds in excess of 200 mph. Success yields points that players can use to upgrade their car's engine, tires, and suspension. The game boasts "real racing and physics strategy," with banked turns, bumping, drafting, and slingshot passing. A second gamer can join in via split-screen mode.

Despite its lack of actual NASCAR licensing, fans of the sport will want to give this game, which is viewed from behind the player's car, a spin. The SNES version is more colorful than its Genesis counterpart, which includes something the SNES version lacks: advertisements for Sega, ESPN, and Sony on the cars.

Notable Quotable:
"If you're a driver who likes to tinker with cars, then *ESPN SpeedWorld* has the racing you want. It's fast, smart, and flat-out fun." –*GamePro* (December 1994)

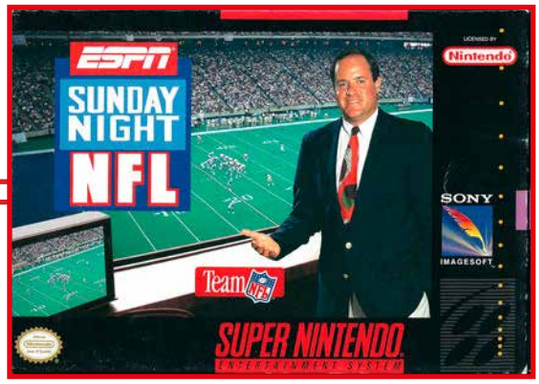
Notable Quotable:
"If you're a fan of racing, there's no doubt that you glue your eyes to ESPN's salute to the sport of skill and danger every time it's on. No doubt when you see Sony's own salute to the show, you'll want to pick it up immediately. Well, hold off. Try renting it first." –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (December 1994)



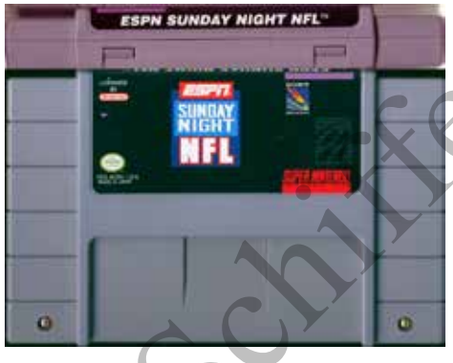
Retro Publishing, LLC

ESPN Sunday Night NFL

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Ringler Studios.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



Introduced and with commentary by Chris Berman, *ESPN Sunday Night NFL* boasts all twenty-eight NFL teams from the 1993 season, but the lack of NFLPA licensing means real player names are not used. The vertical view of the field lets players see the action from one end zone to the other, and the camera zooms in on the receiver or the running back after they get the ball. Game modes include: Single, 1994 Season, Random Season, and Playoffs. Other features and options include: penalties, audibles, power blitzes, speed bursts, spin moves, savable stats, no-huddle offense, two-point conversions, adjustable quarters, (five, ten, or fifteen minutes), weather conditions (dry, rain, or snow), three different types of kicks (deep, onside, and squib), and pre-game, half-time, and post-game reports. The SNES version has better graphics and sounds than the Genesis game. The Sega CD version has superior sound to both.



Notable Quotable:
"There's a good look downfield before the snap and then the camera zooms smoothly in on the action, but the overall animation is rough. ESPN should consider yanking back its license before it becomes the laughing stock of the sports gaming industry." –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (November 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"This game is awful. It feels like one of those games that cared way more about presentation than the actual gameplay. The appeal at the time was seeing and hearing Chris Berman and the ESPN logo . . . the actual gameplay is atrocious . . . the graphics are terrible, and I couldn't feel less in control . . . every pass is a balloon, and it's a total crapshoot if the guy will catch it or not. Avoid this game." –SNESdrunk (YouTube)

Schiffer Publishing Ltd.

E.V.O.: Search for Eden

PUBLISHER: Enix.
DEVELOPER: Almanic.
GAME TYPE: Life Development Simulator/Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

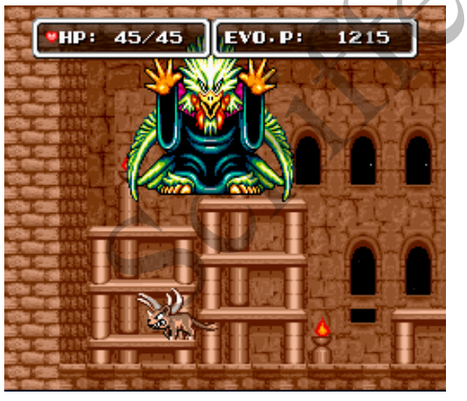
This oddball side-scroller has players evolving their character through five stages: The World Before Land, Early Creatures of Land, Age of Dinosaurs, Ice Age, and Early Man. Players begin as a prehistoric, fish-like creature, swimming, jumping (above the surface of the water), and eating such creatures as eels, jellyfish, squid, sea slugs, and trilobites. Eating creatures earns you EVO points, which are used to purchase evolutionary body parts that upgrade your defense and attacking abilities. You'll eventually evolve into an amphibian and then a land mammal, and your mission will remain to evolve and eat more creatures, including such delicacies as horned lizards, prime frogs, and dinosaurs. There are bosses to dine on as well, including a shark, a queen bee, and a yeti.

Notable Quotable:

"Whilst the strategy component of the game is top-notch, there are concerns elsewhere. Any form of evolution requires specific points, and to gain these you need to kill enemies. This would ideally be done in huge, eight-way scrolling platform levels full of tricks and traps. What we end up with, however, are lots of left-to-right platform-less levels. Overall verdict: A splendid idea, but a very mediocre game." –*Super Play* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"*E.V.O.* is a game for very patient people, because like the evolution process itself, it takes a long time . . . It's a very fascinating game; I like the concept, but it's all a bit tedious . . . it just takes forever. It's like watching grass grow. It's not something you want to pay attention to—just leave it to nature, and it will take care of itself in the background . . . The gameplay and the boss battles aren't enough to keep the game exciting . . . The grinding and the combat just take the life out of a game about life . . . The evolution part is the coolest feature in the game because you choose what you want to evolve: your jaw, your tail, your fins. What I really want to evolve into is Mechagodzilla, but I guess I'll have to settle for a bigger fish." –Lord Karnage (YouTube)



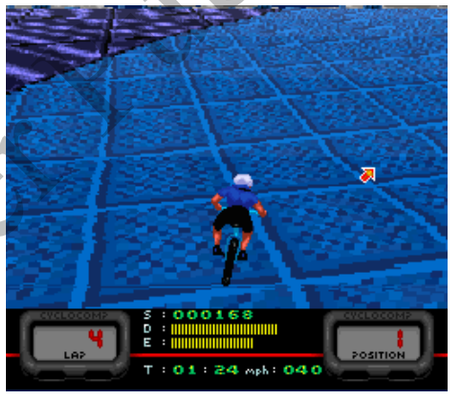
Super Publishing, LLC

Exertainment Mountain Bike Rally

PUBLISHER: Life Fitness.
DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Exercise/Mountain Bike Racing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

Viewed from behind your cyclist, *Exertainment Mountain Bike Rally* is a hard-to-find game that was designed for the Lifecycle 3500, a rare, full-sized, Life Fitness exercise bike add-on. The fitness-based program lets racers select from eight mountain bikes, each of which is rated according to turning, speed, tires, acceleration, and shocks. There are eight characters to choose from, including a mystery rider and a Mountain Demon, and eight courses comprising the fictional Tour de Grunge. There are four circuit stages: qualifier, regional, champion, and final.

During all but the final race, in which you must be in first place after thirty laps, you must complete a set number of laps or achieve a certain score in order to progress. Onlookers throw objects at you, but you can repair damage by riding over items (there are also energy and point boosters). Mode 7 graphics ensure plenty of wide twisting and turning, but the graphics are muddy and ugly. The sound effects are muffled, but the grunge and technopop music fit the action, and the controls work surprisingly well. Terrain is varied, and you can jump, but the real fun is in punching and kicking other cyclists *Road Rash*-style. *Exertainment Mountain Bike Rally* was first released as *Cannondale Cup*, which was not compatible with the Lifecycle 3500.



Insider Insight:
I didn't actually own *Exertainment Mountain Bike Rally* until after I purchased the rare Lifecycle 9XS bike with *Mountain Bike Rally/Speed Racer* combo cartridge! Since this game was meant to be played using the Life Fitness Lifecycle 3500X (simply a converted LC3500), I knew I had to track down this version of the game. The main problem, of course, was finding one of these odd exercise bikes either near me or with affordable shipping. As luck would have it, I was able to track down one on eBay that the seller shipped in multiple boxes. I had the joy of getting the boxes back to my apartment, tearing through the bubble wrap and packing peanuts, and assembling this strange peripheral for the Super Nintendo. It was like Christmas morning for an *Exertainment* fanatic like myself! My wife simply rolled her eyes at the sight of her oddball collector husband setting up yet ANOTHER large video game-related exercise bike!

Over the next several years, I tracked down other *Exertainment* accessories and items that went along with this game, such as the promotional VHS tape that was only available through mail order to showcase how one could ride across multiple terrains in their own living room or just have a personal trainer. Additionally, I got the GOMOD (Graphics Overlay Module) mentioned in the *Mountain Bike Rally* instructional manual that allowed the user to watch television and view their workout stats at the same time!

While *Mountain Bike Rally* and *Speed Racer* (with the combo cartridge) were the only two games to be released for the Exertainment line, I can only imagine what could have been (i.e., *Tetris* and *Pac-Man*) if this awesome product line had been more successful. To be perfectly honest, this is hardly the greatest game ever made for the console, but that adds to the story behind why this product line didn't succeed, and why it will always have a special place in my Exertainment-lovin' heart! –Mike Hodson

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Exertainment Mountain Bike Rally/Speed Racer

PUBLISHER: Life Fitness.
DEVELOPER: Radical Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Exercise/Mountain Bike Racing/Sports Car Racing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

Much rarer than the singular game, *Exertainment Mountain Bike Rally/Speed Racer* has, of course, the complete program for *Exertainment Mountain Bike Rally*, but, as the title states, it also includes *Speed Racer* (which was previously released by itself as a fairly common cartridge). Although extremely scarce, *Exertainment Mountain Bike Rally/Speed Racer* was released to the general public (despite reports to the contrary that state it was unreleased), mainly, it seems, to gyms that had a Life Fitness exercise bike.

Insider Insight:
The *Exertainment Mountain Bike Rally/Speed Racer* combo cartridge has a special place in SNES history, but also in my heart. When I first started collecting in December of 2013, I was just starting on my journey to amass not only old video games, but also knowledge. On my actual birthday the next month, I found an ad on Craigslist with the simple title "Nintendo bike." There were no pictures and not much of a description.

I messaged the seller, who provided a few grainy, odd-angled pictures. I tried to do as much research as I could with the pictures that I had, along with my newbie understanding of what this could be. To the best of my knowledge, this had to be the Life Fitness 9XS Lifecycle, an exercise bike sold to gyms and fitness centers that also came with the rarest licensed SNES game, *Mountain Bike Rally/Speed Racer*. After some back-and-forth emails with the seller, we agreed on a price.

After driving an hour and a half from my apartment and getting lost twice, I managed to confirm this was indeed the mythical 9XS and proceeded to "Tetris" the behemoth into my base-model Nissan Sentra. Once home, I hauled the 200-plus pound monstrosity up to my third floor apartment, and I think that was when I realized I was bitten with the collecting bug. After all, I was willing to go to that much trouble for an old exercise bike!

In trying to gain more information on this oddity, I quickly discovered that there wasn't much out there. This stoked the fire of my desire to focus on odd and obscure items, especially the Exertainment products. This evolved into me, as theirontoupee, getting a reputation as *the* Exertainment guy on NintendoAge.com. Since then, people from around the world have messaged me to ask about history, price checks, shipping dimensions, and identifying components of the bikes, as well as reaching out for leads on spare parts. I love that I found my niche in the collecting community. I hope I can continue to find more Exertainment-related items and help others along the way as they find them too! –Mike Hodson

Player Publishing LTD

Extra Innings

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Sting.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

A simple but feature-rich baseball game in which it is easy to hit homeruns and beat the computer, *Extra Innings* features twelve fictional teams, including such goofily named squads as Bees, Stocks, Surfers, and Valiants. You can create two custom teams, edit the teams' players and stats, select from three stadiums, and turn errors and wind on or off. You can even select automatic or manual fielding. Similar to many earlier baseball games, pressing the d-pad moves the fielders in unison. The game is highly playable, especially in two-player mode, and many of the trappings of real baseball are in place, including bunts, errors, lead-offs, and substitutions. Modes of play include 1P (single game against the computer), 2P (single game against human opponent), All Star, Pennant Race (six teams), and Watch. Released in 1991, in Japan, as *Hakunetsu Pro Yakyuu Ganba League*, the game has short, pudgy, anime-style players. Unlike most baseball games (in video games and in real life), this one has cheerleaders.

Notable Quotable:

"*Extra Innings* is very good . . . pitching and fielding are intuitive, but hitting may take a while to get right . . . there're quite a few different game modes . . . the pace of play here is outstanding. There's no wasted time; the game zips right along . . . worth playing for sure." –SNESdrunk (YouTube)

Insider Insight:

Extra Innings is one of those rare games that my brother and I both enjoyed. Unlike my big bro, I'm not a huge sports game fan, and in turn he can't enjoy an RPG because, according to him, "They are stupid and take too long." *Extra Innings* allows you both the fun of a traditional sports game, with the RPG-like editing capabilities to make teams of your own choosing!

Usually, my brother and I would make a team comprised of friends and family, topped off by our father throwing 150-mph fastballs. Even though my actual father hadn't played a game of real baseball at that point for probably thirty years, it didn't matter—batters were going to sweat bullets handling fireballs from my on-screen old man.

It's that personal connection in naming your players that makes *Extra Innings* so much fun. I still play it today and post photos of the results on Facebook as if I were reporting a real game. There's nothing more hilarious than telling a friend who doesn't know anything about sports that his SNES namesake hit the game-winning homerun. At the same time, when a pitcher comes off the bench to save the game—you know, after my father gets tired of lighting up the strike count—it's cool to share that, too.

Most of all, *Extra Innings* is special to me because my brother and I have many differences. I eat yogurt, but he won't touch it. He eats cotton candy-flavored grapes, and I wonder what's wrong with the regular ones. But we agree that if you tap the button to pitch in just the right sequence in *Extra Innings*, you can throw a super-slow pitch that blurs and almost always gets a strike. And, of course, we agree that it's a blast naming all those players. –Nick DeMarco

Shiffer Publishing, LTD

F1 Pole Position

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft.
DEVELOPER: Human Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Formula-1/Indy Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

Viewed from behind your car, *F1 Pole Position*, which is called *Human Grand Prix* in Japan, is one of those racers that is split-screen, even during one-player games. A horizontal strip across the center of the screen shows your speed and other stats. There are sixteen twisting, turning tracks patterned after the actual 1992 Formula One season and three game modes. In Battle mode, you select rivals from among thirteen opponents, including such stars as Nigel Mansell and Michael Andretti (but no Ayrton Senna), and you can select the course, course conditions (dry, wet, or half), and number of laps. You can also select your driver/car, such as Jean Alesi in his Ferrari or Gerhard Berger in his Honda V12. Each car is rated according to body, engine, and total, and you can customize and fine-tune your car's brakes, gears, steering, tires, suspension, and wings.

Other options include automatic or manual gear shifting, automatic or manual pit work, and analog or digital tachometer. World Gran Prix is a full season while Test Run is for practice on any track without other racers on the road. The game runs fast, and it looks and sounds good, with smooth scrolling and loudly revving engines. It's also quite challenging. Cars can lightly bump one another, but can also appear to run right through one another in order to pass, which is odd. Followed by *F1 Pole Position 64* (N64). The first sequel, *F1 Pole Position 2*, was released in Europe and Japan, but not the U.S.

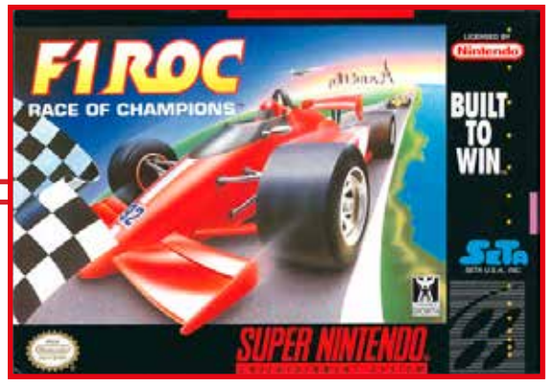
Notable Quotable:

"When playing this on my large widescreen TV, I was really unsure of what to expect—would it look terrible? Fortunately, the game really hits you with its big introduction as half a dozen F1 cars come roaring at you from the darkness, with the big engines filling the speakers . . . hard and fast music . . . this game means business . . . The menus still look gorgeous . . . when setting up your car, the game shows you the car's internals and where each piece fits . . . This feels very much the same as *Mario Kart*, although a little more serious and quite a bit more difficult . . . You really get a good sense of speed going through the corners; however, this isn't replicated with the straights, as they feel slow and dull . . . The graphics and sound are really top quality, and I found myself actually wanting to master the corners and finish the race, despite being in last place." –GP Race Games (www.gpracegames.com)

After Publishing, LLC

F1 Roc: *Race of Champions*

PUBLISHER: Seta U.S.A.
DEVELOPER: Seta Corporation.
GAME TYPE: Formula-1/Indy Racing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.



A professional-looking game, *F1 Roc: Race of Champions* gives players a different twisting, turning track (from the 1992 Formula One season) in each of sixteen different countries: Italy, Great Britain, Germany, Brazil, San Marino, Spain, Portugal, Mexico, Hungary, Canada, France, Belgium, Australia, U.S.A., Monaco, and Japan. You can select: Training mode, which is a single race; Grand Prix, which lets you perform a Test Run where you drive on two laps of the track of your choice using your Grand Prix car; or Race mode, where you compete against seven other drivers and earn points and prize money based on your finish. You can use the cash earned from winning races to upgrade your car's brakes, suspension, chassis, front wing, rear wing, engines, tires, and diffuser, the last of which affects the balance between acceleration and braking. You can also purchase nitros for extra speed.

Slowdown occurs when the tracks get crowded, but Mode 7 graphics (as seen in *F-Zero*), solid computer A.I., and good sound effects make for a decent racing game. One setback is the ease of play after your car has been enhanced. Also, the cars are a bit on the small side. Released as *Exhaust Heat* in Europe and Japan.

Insider Insight:
Racing games mainly come in one of two flavors on the 16-bit systems: top-down or pseudo 3D, into-the-screen. The Super Nintendo offered a new way to present this approach, replacing the sometimes awkwardly choppy sprite-scaling methods with the smoother Mode 7 graphical routine.

The angled perspective in *F1 Roc* is higher than most, occupying its own space between the typical into-the-screen perspective and a purely top-down viewpoint. This avoids the issue of not being able to see the angle of the upcoming corners, but it's hard to see what it gains from the less steep gradient compared to *F-Zero* or *Super Mario Kart*.

The game is based on the 1992 Formula 1 season, albeit without fully licensed names for the teams and drivers, but anyone familiar with the era will be able to match up the loosely disguised facsimiles. Other areas have sacrificed authenticity for action: the qualifying and race sessions are firmly in the realm of quick arcade bursts, the cars have nitrous oxide-fueled boosts, and after every on-track session, you can use any prize money that you have earned to purchase upgrades for the car to help you climb through the ranks of the world championship.

A racing game lives and dies on its handling and on the competition, and these are areas where *F1 Roc* is a letdown. Often it feels like there are large gaps of empty track in between your competitors, and when you do end up battling with them, merely brushing them causes them to speed off into the distance, while you suffer from a crippling loss of speed. If you're really unlucky you could even find that you spin off the track into the corner of a barrier, with little left to do but rotate the car slowly until you are no longer stuck.

Despite these flaws, and the somewhat mediocre impression that the action manages to convey, *F1 Roc* remains a game that will keep you dipping in and out of, entertaining you just long enough for it to not outstay its welcome. –Ben Lancaster

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

F1-Roc II: *Race of Champions*

PUBLISHER: Seta U.S.A.
DEVELOPER: Seta Corporation.
GAME TYPE: Formula-1/Indy Racing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

The sequel to *F1 Roc: Race of Champions*, this game puts players in competition with twenty-five other racers, the ultimate goal being the Grand Prix championship. As in the original game, there are sixteen tracks to race on, but *F1-Roc II* ups the ante by giving players selectable Formula One cars, including the FW14B Williams, the F92 Ferrari, the McLaren MP4, and the Benettion B192, among others. Tracks sport such names as Moon City, Green Hill, and Desert Snake. You begin the game in a prototype Group C car and must win on eight tracks to advance. Then you race in F3000 cars, followed by facing off against real 1992 Formula One season drivers and their cars.

In the original *F1 Roc: Race of Champions*, you entered pit stops only to repair damage. Here damage isn't a problem, but pit stops are extremely useful, as your crew will change all four of your tires. Where the original game looked and felt somewhat like *Super Mario Kart*, this one plays more like *F-Zero*. Once again, players can upgrade their car with new parts, including tires, engines, brakes, rear wing, front wing, and suspension, but this sequel offers more of a challenge than the first game, making those parts more crucial to the action. Released as *Exhaust Heat II* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"The many tracks, the realistic strategy, and the good controls make this an interesting game. Still, for hard-charging intensity and head-to-head action, you'll have to steer elsewhere." –*GamePro* (October 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"*F-1* rocks! This sequel can't get any better. Noticeably, the graphics and sounds have greatly improved. As for the racing aspect, smoother controls allow you to handle your vehicle's turns with perfect precision. Too cool! Start saving up, gamers!" –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1994)

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Faceball 2000

PUBLISHER: Bullet-Proof Software.
DEVELOPER: Xanth Software F/X.
GAME TYPE: First-Person Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

Described in the manual as "the greatest virtual reality sport of the future," *Faceball 2000* has one or two cooperative players guiding a targeting site through a *Wolfenstein 3D*-type maze, shooting different types of Smiloids that roam the mazes. Your shots appear as yellow balls, and the Smiloids, some of which attack by touch while others can shoot, are simple smiling shapes. There are power-ups to grab, including shield, freeze (freezes enemies), camo (enemies ignore player), sensor (reveals enemy locations on map), armor, weapon (increases number of shots player can have in air at once), and speed up. This is the CyberZone mode of play, which is comprised of forty-one levels. An Arena mode is available as well, in which players compete with one another or cooperate against a team of Smiloids. Two-player action is split-screen. *Faceball 2000* was adapted from *MIDI Maze*, the Atari ST computer game released in 1987. The Game Boy version, which has different levels but similar gameplay, supports up to four players.

Notable Quotable:

"*Faceball 2000* is quite the impressive technical feat. Even though the floors [and walls] are featureless . . . and even though the balls look more like misshapen blobs than weapons, it's impossible to forget that what you're looking at shouldn't have been possible on Nintendo's gray-and-purple box . . . you'll have almost precisely twice the fun playing with a friend than you'll have when going it alone . . . the question at the end of the day is this: is *Faceball 2000* really worth playing? Unless you're someone like me who just has to try those oddities, it's not. I'd love to see someone update this . . . With some impressive, vibrant architecture, and the frantic action I'm sure the developers had in mind when they made *Faceball 2000*, an update could be the sleeper hit of the year." –Jason Venter (www.honestgamers.com)

Insider Insight:

Atari ST owners were playing *Faceball 2000* by another name in 1987—*MIDI Maze*. *Faceball 2000* is actually a port of the computer game that landed on the SNES five years later in 1992, still eight years shy of the second millennium. While I was not fortunate enough to own an Atari ST, my good buddy David Lewis was. After playing on his home computer for years, I was ready to tackle the game on my Super Nintendo.

The popular network game became a two-player split-screen title when adapted to the SNES. If you ever wanted to step into Pac-Man's shoes, this is as close as you may ever get. In fact, you play as a yellow smiley face maneuvering within a 3D maze—quite a trick for the Super Nintendo. In the game you face off (excuse the pun) against other smiling faces referred to as Smiloids. Don't let their jovial facades fool you, as they are quite deadly regardless of their appearance. Despite the fact that they are hunting you, the Smiloids are quite polite and tell you to "have a nice day" after they kill you. –Michael Thomasson

Scrifer Publishing LTD

Family Dog

PUBLISHER: Malibu Games.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering Inc.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Based on the short-lived animated television series (1993, ten episodes), *Family Dog* looks and sounds a lot like its inspiration. Unfortunately, it is hampered by sluggish controls, uneven difficulty, a weak attack mechanism, and slow gameplay (sometimes when the dog falls from high places it seemingly takes forever to land). Users guide the dog through the house, obedience school, and a forest as he barks at cats and other enemies, including Dobermans. He also: dodges toys, a blender, and a vacuum cleaner; frees caged birds; does acrobatic flips and spins; runs up and down stairs; jumps over obstacles (a major part of the action is running along the floor, taking long leaps); bounces on couches and tree limbs; digs for bones; escapes the kennel; and performs other dogged tasks. There are fetch-based mini-games as well. Fans of the show might like the game's quirky animations and sense of humor, but the action leaves a lot to be desired.

Fun Fact:
Created by Brad Bird and produced by Steven Spielberg and Tim Burton, the *Family Dog* cartoon first appeared as an animated episode of *Amazing Stories* (1987, second season).

Memories:
People complaining, justifiably so, about the brevity of *Family Dog*, which skilled gamers should be able to beat in about ten minutes, reminds me of a joke Woody Allen tells in the classic film *Annie Hall* (1977): "Two elderly women are at a Catskill mountain resort, and one of 'em says, 'Boy, the food at this place is really terrible.' The other one says, 'Yeah, I know; and such small portions.' Well, that's essentially how I feel about life—full of loneliness, and misery, and suffering, and unhappiness, and it's all over much too quickly."

Notable Quotable:
"Lackluster translation of an unpopular cartoon . . . Once you are accustomed to the controls, what lies ahead is but a plain, boring, and incredibly unimaginative platform game . . . The graphics are predictably simple and cartoony. The animation is very choppy . . . The backgrounds are reused repeatedly, like a bad Hanna-Barbera cartoon, and they're just plain dull. The sound effects are sparse, and the music is well-below SNES standards . . . a 'cute' façade but the game itself is quite ordinary, tiresome in fact . . . very uneven. The first half is too easy, and the second half is too hard." –Kevin Oleniacz (*Digital Press* fanzine #26, July/August 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"The first level is inside the house. A typical American house with a mile-long first floor with duplicate window curtains and cats, flying books, dog treats, dreidels, and other silly crap all over the floor. Behind pillars and bookshelves is a little boy trying to shoot stuff at the dog. It's really quite cruel. Are the game developers trying to teach people how not to treat animals? Is this a PETA game? Flying books made sense in the New York Public Library, but is the dog's house haunted? After a few stages, you're invited by the boy to play fetch. Seems sane and friendly enough. You have to run after the ball with the 'X' button (incredibly awkward controls). If you don't run your little doggie's heart out fast enough, the ball hits a little baby girl down the hallway and she starts to cry, which means you lose a life. So, does a family member beat the dog and you lose a life? Again, no explanation here. Kinda terrifying." –Mark Freedman (gamecola.net)

Insider Insight:
I tuned in live every week when *Amazing Stories* aired on our local CBS affiliate in the late '80s. That was how I, and the rest of the world, was first introduced to *Family Dog*. Despite being one of the more popular episodes in Steven Spielberg's anthology series, it was not developed into its own program until six years later in 1993, when Tim Burton was added as co-producer of the show. *Family Dog* was released as a video game at the same time.

Obviously, this game is about a dog's life, and like my own dog, the family dog can do most of the usual tricks that a real dog can—that is, short of licking its own bum. He'll walk, run, duck, jump, and even try to avoid the vacuum cleaner in this platform title. Of course, the family dog can bark, but oddly only has said ability after consuming a valuable and much appreciated dog treat. I can't state that I was as impressed with the game as I was the show. That would be difficult as it was over almost before it began. Literally, it had only three short levels and could be completed in fewer than ten minutes! The feeling of emptiness after six years of anticipation resulted in me burying the game in the backyard. Only a dedicated Nintendo collector, or perhaps a dog catcher, will seek this title out. –Michael Thomasson

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Family Feud

PUBLISHER: GameTek.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering Inc.
GAME TYPE: Game Show, 1–10 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

As in the long-running game show, *Family Feud* for the SNES pits two families of five against one another, each buzzing in to try and guess the top responses (derived from a survey of one hundred people) to such questions as "Name a famous Alan," "Give me a magazine with a one-word name," and "Name a bad habit that usually makes for a bad roommate." Players input their answers by using a cursor to select letters and numbers that appear in rows at the bottom of the screen. There are more than 4,000 questions in all.

The master of ceremonies is generic, meaning host Ray Combs, who hosted the show from 1988–1994, was not involved in the project. Like its Genesis counterpart, SNES *Family Feud* includes a password feature and the Bullseye round (a series of questions where you must get the number-one answer), both of which were absent from the 1991 NES rendition (Bullseye wasn't a part of the TV program until 1993). First appearing on ABC in 1976, *Family Feud* was adapted to numerous other consoles, including the PlayStation, PlayStation 2, Xbox 360, and Nintendo Wii, among others.

Notable Quotable:

"The one problem with this type of game is that you will eventually see all of the survey questions, even with over 4,000 stored on the cartridge. But unlike *Jeopardy!* or *Wheel of Fortune*, there are multiple answers (some very strange!) that rely on the general public's responses rather than facts. So it's not always easy to memorize or remember previous answers. The only other things the game needs are saved high score lists (families can return via password, however) and more voice samples from the host like 'Survey Says!' (he only says it at the final round)." –All Game Guide (formerly at allgame.com)

Copyright Publishing

Fatal Fury

PUBLISHER: Takara.
DEVELOPER: Nova.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

A port of SNK's arcade game, which was subtitled "King of Fighters" and released the same year as *Street Fighter II* (1991), *Fatal Fury* for the SNES lacks the coin-op classic's distinguishing trademark: the ability for fighters to jump back and forth between the foreground and background. Also gone are the story cutscenes, the spectators watching the fights, and certain voice effects. And for some reason the arm wrestling bonus stages have been dropped in favor of punching, kicking, and otherwise smashing tires that come bouncing in from the left and right sides of the screen.

In Championship Battle mode, players control one of three heroes, each with standard (punch, kick, jump, crouch) as well as special fighting moves. Said fighters include: martial artist Terry Bogard (burn knuckle, slam attack, super shot kick, power wave); Ko-po expert and Terry's younger brother Andy Bogard (body spin, dragon bullet, shotgun kick, flying punch); and Japanese Mu-e-Tai

Champ Joe Higashi (slash kick, machine-gun punch, tiger kick, hurricane uppercut). The one-on-one action pits you against a variety of opponents, including Michael Max (boxer), Raiden (pro wrestler), Billy Kane (javelin user), and King of the Fighters Tournament sponsor Geese Howard (martial artist who unleashes violent waves).

In two-player Street Fight mode, one player selects from Terry, Andy, and Joe while the other player can fight as any of the game's eleven characters. Matches are the typical two-out-three variety. Battle arenas include Pow Pow Café, Sound Beach, Howard Arena, and West Subway. The Genesis version retains the two-plane fighting action of the arcade game, but it is missing bonus rounds and two of the characters: Hwa Jai and Billy Kane. Also released for the Neo Geo and Neo Geo CD.

Notable Quotable:

"While often inaccurately perceived as a *Street Fighter II* clone, *Fatal Fury* (known in Japan as *Garou Densetsu: Shukumei no Tatakai*, or *Legend of the Hungry Wolves: The Fated Battle*) was actually in development

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at the same time as *Street Fighter II*. What's more, all of SNK's fighting game operations were helmed by Takashi Nishiyama and Hiroshi Matsumoto, who had formerly created the very first *Street Fighter* for Capcom in 1987. So the game's similarities are the result of them being different re-interpretations of the same source. *Street Fighter* director Takashi Nishiyama even referred to *Fatal Fury* as 'my *Street Fighter II*.'" –Hardcore Gaming 101 (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Insider Insight:
It was February 11, 1994, in Brooklyn, New York. To say it wasn't cold was like saying Kate Upton wasn't hot. I was ten years old, and I decided to stay home from school because it was snowing. Two days before, it had snowed nine inches, and on this day, almost thirteen—it was a blizzard. Instead of staying home and watching gameshows, I went out and shoveled snow all over my neighborhood to make money. Before Instagram and cell phones took over America's youth, we actually worked to buy ourselves things. After about seven hours of shoveling, I virtually crawled into my local video store, Joe's Video Galaxy, and bought a few Super Nintendo games: *International Tennis Tour*, *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, and *Fatal Fury*. While the first two titles were mediocre, *Fatal Fury* was unlike anything I'd ever played before.

Soon enough, I was home and defrosted, and I plugged *FF* into the system. Originally disappointed that the game only had three characters, I was quickly impressed by its visuals and the ferocity of the characters. I soon called over my twin brother, and that's when it happened. Terry and Andy Bogard, two of the main characters, were brothers on a quest to beat Geese Howard, the man who killed their father. Although our father was alive and well, being ten, it felt cool to take turns with my brother to avenge our loving father. We spent hours on that game for months, and although I eventually beat Mr. Howard by myself, thanks primarily to Terry's Power Wave, I like to think all that play time with my strawberry-blonde headed, spunky little brother paved the way for that to happen. –Patrick Hickey Jr.

Insider Insight:
In 1996, my mom got married, and we took a trip to Roswell, New Mexico (yes, the alien town) to meet my new stepdad's family. Soon after we arrived at his parent's house, I realized that there wasn't much to do for a kid who was only five. While playing with my toys in the living room, I snooped around a bit, wandered into a bedroom down the hall, and found a Super Nintendo. I also found my new step uncle, Roman.

Roman and I hit it off immediately, and we ended up playing lots of games on his SNES during my stay, including *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter II* (both of which I had already been enjoying in the arcades, even though I was only five). On the day we were leaving, Roman handed me a box and told me I could take it home. Amazingly enough, inside that box was the Super Nintendo we had been playing and all his games and controllers—he told me that I would get more use out of it than he would. Needless to say, I was pretty excited.

When we got back to my house in Belen, New Mexico, I decided to play some *Street Fighter II* on my "new to me" SNES, but then a game with an interesting label caught my eye. I popped it into the SNES, and the words FATAL FURY popped up on the screen. After just a few rounds of play, *Fatal Fury* cemented my love for fighting games. In fact, I became so enamored with the action and fascinated by the characters that I ended up playing it even more than *Street Fighter II*. Instead of trying to "Hadouken!" my way through school, I just wanted a cool hat and dope vest like Terry Bogard. –Alex Thompson

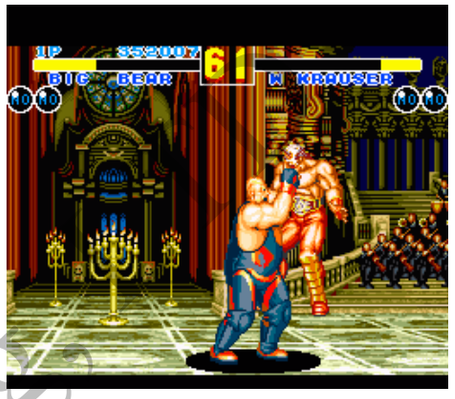
Prima Publishing, LTD

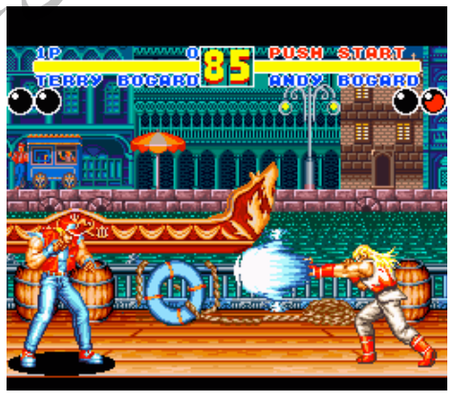
Fatal Fury 2

PUBLISHER: Takara.
DEVELOPER: Takara.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Geese Howard was defeated in the first *Fatal Fury*, but a new opponent, Wolfgang Krauser, has brought about a new tournament. Terry Bogard, Andy Bogard, and Joe Higashi return as playable characters, joined by Big Bear (wrestler, who can do a devastating flame burst "comeback move" when his health bar turns red), Jubei Yamada (judo warrior, dynamite spin), Cheng Sinzan (wealthy businessman, super napalm), Kim Kaphwan (master of taekwondo, thresher wedge), and Mai Shiranui (master of ninjitsu and Koppo-ken, fire fury tackle). Bosses to battle include Billy Kane, Axle Hawk, Laurence Blood, and Wolfgang Krauser.

Unlike the first *Fatal Fury* for the SNES, this sequel retains the ability for fighters to jump back and forth between the foreground and background (of such locations as Thailand, Spain, Italy, Japan, Korea, U.S.A., Great Britain, and Australia). The *Street Fighter II*-style action also remains, with players employing a variety of punches (hard and weak), kicks (hard and weak), taunts, throws, and special moves (fireballs, uppercuts, drop kicks, and more) in a series of one-on-one fights. Players can battle a friend or a computer opponent, or engage in an Elimination Match, which is a team battle for two players. Based on SNK's 1992 arcade game. Also released for the PlayStation 2 (via *Fatal Fury Battle Archives Vol. 1*), Genesis, and Neo Geo.





Fun Fact:
Mai was rated #4 in GameSpy.com's "Top Ten Babes in Games" feature and #5 in *Game Informer*'s "Top Ten Hottest Girls of the 16-Bit era."

Notable Quotable:
"*Fatal Fury 2* marks a dramatic improvement over the original one-on-one fighter. There are only eight fighters, but you can choose from any of them. The animation is improved, and the background scenery is quite attractive. The controls have been revamped to include high and low kicks, high and low punches, and two additional attacks . . . The audio is still weak, though, with muffled sound effects and tunes you won't find yourself singing in the shower. The main thing that struck me about *Fatal Fury 2* is how similar it is to *Street Fighter II*. Not only are the controls similar, but the overall presentation is a carbon copy, all the way down to the globe on the character select screen. And one last thing—could they come up with a less attractive group of fighters? I mean, there's only one female, and half of the characters are obese!" –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Schiffer Publishing

Fatal Fury Special

PUBLISHER: Takara.
DEVELOPER: Takara.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Essentially an expanded version of *Fatal Fury 2*, *Fatal Fury Special* features the eight fighters from that game: Terry Bogard, Andy Bogard, Joe Higashi, Kim Kaphwan, Jubei Yamada, Cheng Sinzan, Mai Shiranui, and Big Bear. Plus, you can play as Duck King, Tung Fu Rue, and Geese Howard from the first *Fatal Fury*, and the bosses from *Fatal Fury 2* are immediately playable. They are Billy Kane (club blow, sparrow drop, club twist, super power club), Axle Hawk (smash bomber, spinning fire fist), Laurence Blood (bloody saber, bloddy spin, bloody cutter), and Wolfgang Krauser (blitz ball). And, if you beat the game without a single loss, you can face Ryo Sakazaki, a Kyokugenryu Karate expert from *Art of Fighting*.

The game also has a new combo system, faster playing speed, new special attacks, new 3D attacks, Dolby surround sound, better background graphics, extra color schemes for each character, and a new Count Down mode where you try to defeat as many opponents as possible in three minutes. Based on SNK's 1993 arcade game. Known as *Garō Densetsu: First Contact* in Japan. Also released for the PlayStation 2 (via *Fatal Fury Battle Archives Vol. 1*), Game Gear, Sega CD, Neo Geo, and Neo Geo CD. Followed by *Fatal Fury 3: Road to the Final Victory* (arcade, Neo Geo, Neo Geo CD), *Fatal Fury: First Contact* (Neo Geo Pocket Color), and various other sequels.

Notable Quotable:

"It's a step down, but the SNES version of one of the Neo Geo's best fighting series isn't a bad fighter at all. The graphics are the best on any platform outside its original format, and the control is decent. Words of warning; if you don't have a joystick controller, you are going to have a very difficult time executing the fatal moves. The only other gripe I have is that the sounds are a bit annoying, especially with the surround sound. You have to resort to a monaural setting." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1995)

Insider Insight:

With the advent of *Street Fighter II* in the early 1990s, I became an aficionado of fighting games. Was I any good at them? No, not really … but there was that one time at the arcade when I played through *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, only dropping one round to Balrog, so I do have that—ha ha!

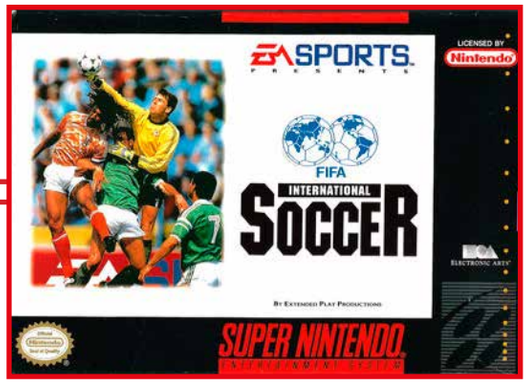
Most of the SNK fighting games I liked came out for the SNES, so since there was no way I could afford SNK's Neo Geo system or the $200 game cartridges that came with it, I settled for the SNES versions. I was really looking forward to *Fatal Fury Special* because the expanded cast of playable characters included bosses Billy Kane and Geese Howard, as well as Ryo Sakazaki from the Art of Fighting series. The video game store in my local mall offered pre-orders—this was in the faraway time before you had to plop down some money to pre-order a game; you just put your name on a list, and the store would hold a copy for you once the game released. I pre-ordered *Fatal Fury Special* a good two months before it came out, then promptly forgot that I had pre-ordered it when the release day arrived.

I went back to the game store a couple days after *Fatal Fury Special* hit the streets, hoping to find a copy because, umm, I forgot to pre-order it. Yup, I'm a real smart guy. So I get to the store and ask if there are any copies left. The guy behind the counter tells me there is one copy left, but someone pre-ordered it and didn't come in to pick it up. I remember thinking it was my lucky day, so I bought it. I left the store thinking, "That guy should have picked up his game!" But then I thought a little longer and realized that I was the dummy who forgot that he was the one who pre-ordered it! –Thor Thorvaldson

Sonfire Publishing, LLC

FIFA International Soccer

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: Extended Play Productions.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



Like its Genesis counterpart, *FIFA International Soccer* for the SNES is a fine (not to mention fun) soccer sim viewed from an isometric perspective. However, the sound effects and animation aren't as polished, and scoring is a bit easier. In addition, there are "only" thirty international teams (as opposed to forty-eight in the Genesis game). On the plus side, the SNES version does offer instant replays, five-player action (as opposed to four-player), and a power bar that lets players determine how hard to throw or kick the ball. Players can also do headers, volleys, half volleys, bicycle kicks, corner kicks, penalty kicks, free kicks, and throw-ins. Four modes of play are available: Exhibition, Tournament, Playoffs, and League. Also released for the Game Boy, Game Gear, Sega CD, and 3DO. The Master System version wasn't released in the U.S.

Notable Quotable:

"The now-iconic isometric perspective was never intended for soccer; originally it was conceived by Jon Law and Jules Burt for a beach volleyball game they were hoping to sell to EA Sports. 'I remember Matt Webster from EA travelling all the way up north to visit us,' recalls Jules Burt. 'He told us our volleyball project wasn't going ahead. However, he also had news of another game they wanted us to help develop—soccer.' At the request of EA, Law and Burt devised two other possible ways in which a game of football [soccer] could be presented. Their only directive was that the game must not look like *Sensible Soccer*, which at the time was the most popular football game on the market. One was a side-scrolling pitch, with parallax scrolling to give depth. Another was a 'forward into the screen pitch' not dissimilar to *Super Soccer*. But it was the original beach volleyball isometric that Webster still favored." –Julian Hill (www.boxedpixels.co.uk)

Schiffer Publishing LTD

FIFA Soccer 96

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: Probe Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Although *FIFA Soccer 95* didn't make it to the SNES (as it did for the Genesis), the console did get *FIFA Soccer 96*, which, like the Genesis version, offers a number of additions to the series, including a Practice Mode, smarter computer A.I., team strategy and formation options, and new offensive moves and features, including sprint dribbles, realistic player fakes, passing arrows, and give-and-gos. Friendly (exhibition), League, Playoff, and Tournament modes are available, and you can turn on or off such options as fouls, injuries, and offsides. For expert players, there's a Pro Mode. The view of the field is from an isometric perspective.

The SNES version offers five-player action (as opposed to four-player) and digitized commentary by John Motson, but it lacks player creation and trading from the Genesis game. More than 3,500 players (animated via Motion Design technology) representing twelve international leagues are featured. Teams are rated according to shooting, running, passing, tackling, goalies, attack, and overall. Produced by Extended Play Productions, but development was handed to Probe Entertainment. Also released for the PlayStation and Saturn. The Sega 32X version was only released in Europe.

Notable Quotable:

"Although the sound earns a yellow card in this go-around, *FIFA 96* delves deeper into the international world of soccer. *FIFA Soccer 96* still has no worthy SNES rivals." –*GamePro* (December 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"If you can live with the uneven pace and slightly restrictive view, then *FIFA Soccer 96* will more than satisfy those craving some depth in their sports titles." –All Game Guide (formerly at allgame.com)

Future Publishing, LTD

FIFA Soccer 97 Gold Edition

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: Rage Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1996.

The fourth game in the series, *FIFA Soccer 97 Gold Edition* is similar to *FIFA Soccer 96* (complete with five-player action and isometric perspective), but it does boast a few fresh features, including: a six aside indoor game (in a wooden floor arena with hard walls), faster gameplay, new sound effects and crowd chants, smarter goalies, and improved set plays. You can select your squad from more than 255 teams (there are more than 4,000 players total). Motion capture technology gives the players realistic movements. Modes of play include Friendly (exhibition), Leagues, Tournaments, Playoffs, and Practice. Also released for the Genesis. Released as *FIFA Soccer 97* for the Game Boy, PlayStation, and Saturn. The PlayStation and Saturn versions featured polygonal players. Oddly enough, no non-Gold edition exists for the SNES or Genesis. Followed by numerous sequels for a variety of consoles, including *FIFA: Road to World Cup 98* for the PlayStation, Saturn, and Nintendo 64.

Notable Quotable:

"Another annual upgrade of an EA Sports game. *GamePro* gave it high marks, but said that the lack of significant new features made it so that it was not worth upgrading if you owned the previous year's version." –SNES Central (snescentral.com)

Schiffer Publishing

DK

Fighter's History

PUBLISHER: Data East.
DEVELOPER: Data East.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

A solid port of the 1993 arcade game, *Fighter's History* for the Super NES is an unabashed *Street Fighter II* clone, but with less likable (though mostly familiar-seeming) characters. Players select from nine different fighters for use in three modes of play: CPU Battle, Versus (two-player), and Survival (tournament). Fighters include: Clay (martial artist), Fei-Lin (master of the ancient Chinese To-Ro-Zan art of fire), Ryoko (judo student), Matlock (fighting punk rocker), Samchay (kick boxer), Lee (kung-fu expert), Mizoguchi (karate expert), Jean-Pierre (gymnast), Marstorius (pro wrestler), Karnov (fighting trainer), and Clown (circus performer).

The combatants have a number of *SFII*-like punching and kicking maneuvers, along with such special moves as big tornado, spinning wave, vacuum backflip, needle shower, and fist fireball. Plus, they can squat, jump, and execute throws and upper and lower defense moves. Each fighter has a weak spot that will make him or her stunned and unable to move when hit repeatedly. If the weak spot suffers enough damage, the character gets knocked out. Levels of difficulty include easiest, very easy, easy, medium, hard, very hard, and hardest. Followed by *Fighter's History Dynamite* (arcade, various).

Fun Fact:
Capcom sued Data East over the arcade version of *Fighter's History* but lost, despite the game's many similarities to *Street Fighter II*.

Notable Quotable:
"While I typically don't drool on most fighting games, *Fighter's History* has some strong points. The control, for instance, is top-notch. There aren't many fighting games where I can actually do a special move when I really want to, yet with this one I can. The addition of weak points on the characters are great! *Fighter's History* is definitely worth a look if you want something new in the fighting game genre." —*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1994)

Insider Insight:
With the instant fame of *Street Fighter II*, not only in the arcades but also on the Super Nintendo, it was only a matter of time before the clones and followers made their way to the market. Specifically, 1993 was a big year for fighting games as we saw the home releases of *Mortal Kombat II* and *Super Street Fighter II*, so it wasn't a surprise to anyone when games like *Fighter's History* started appearing in the magazines and on store shelves.

Nearly everything about *Fighter's History* was a clone of *Street Fighter II*. It was a new game in a genre that was only a couple of years old, and the masses were starving for more fighting games. *Fighter's History* was a competent game, even though I knew many people in school who scoffed at it when we would look at the reviews and ads in the game magazines. The thing about *Fighter's History* was this: It was a good clone. It even possessed some components that were better than *Street Fighter II*, such as armor that fell off during battle and a variety of post-battle dialog (more than just two sentences per character).

My family must have rented this game at least a dozen times. We groaned and laughed a little in the beginning, but we played it to see just how close it really was to the Street Fighter franchise. We would focus on the characters, easily seeing the similar visuals and fighting moves between each of the games. Those similarities quickly faded as we played matches and got lost in the exciting gameplay. Unlike a lot of clones, you can really see the effort that was put into *Fighter's History*. As far as classic fighting games go, this is a great one. –Zoe K. Howard

Sniffer Publishing, LTD

Final Fantasy II

PUBLISHER: Square.
DEVELOPER: Square.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

This is actually the fourth game in the "Final Fantasy" series, but it was called *Final Fantasy II* because the second and third games weren't released in the U.S. at the time. The game is set in the Kingdom of Baron, where powerful airships rule the skies. You play the leader of this fighting force, a knight called Cecil Harvey, a.k.a. Captain of the Red Wings. You and your party's job is to defeat the king's dark forces and save the world from their evil plan to control powerful crystals.

Cecil must explore dungeons, castles, towns, and villages, which are linked together in an overworld you can traverse on foot (and later via various airships). As you maneuver about, you'll have random encounters with groupings of up to five enemies. When you win a battle (fights are turn-based), you'll be awarded gil (money), experience points, and sometimes a dropped item. You can use gil in shops to purchase helpful items, armor, and weapons. You can sell things as well. As you accumulate experience, your character can level up and have their stats boosted, including strength, agility, vitality, wisdom, will, attack, defense, and magic defense.

Final Fantasy II introduced an ATB (active-time battle) system, in which the game doesn't pause when you access the battle menu, where you select fight, magic, item, retreat, change, or parry. Enemies continue to perform in real time regardless of the actions of your party. As time passes, your character's gauge automatically fills. When said gauge is full, the character can perform an action, such as using an item or casting a spell. Enemies have gauges as well, but you can't see them. You lose a battle when all your party members are knocked out or petrified, but you can restore them by using spells, potions, and the like.

Prior to beginning your adventure, you can enter a training room for battle tips, controller tips, and to change the names of your characters. You can rename your party at other points in the game as well. Released for the PlayStation as *Final Fantasy IV* (with a full motion opening and ending sequence) and the Game Boy Advance as *Final Fantasy IV Advance*. Remade with 3D graphics for the Nintendo DS as *Final Fantasy IV*.

Notable Quotable:

"Super Nintendo was a great system for fans of RPGs. This Square classic started the genre's explosion on the 16-bit console, and did so in style. It also begot many of the series' staples, such as Chocobos [flightless birds you can ride], vehicles, and party configuration. The story was original, and deviated from the simple 'villain snags princess' fare we'd been spoon-fed in so many role-playing games before. Cecil's inner struggle made him more than just a chivalrous knight, and gave the game personality." –*Game Informer* #100 (August 2001), which ranked *Final Fantasy II* the 40th greatest video game of all time.

Notable Quotable:

"*Final Fantasy IV* [*Final Fantasy II*] represents a major turning point for the long-running JRPG series. It was only the second game in the series to come stateside, released at the time as *Final Fantasy II*, and it introduced major changes to the gameplay that would persist for decades. Everything from the Active Time Battle System and the game's focus on a large cast of playable characters to the deep and complex narrative would go on to become hallmarks of the Final Fantasy series. *Final Fantasy IV* centers on the

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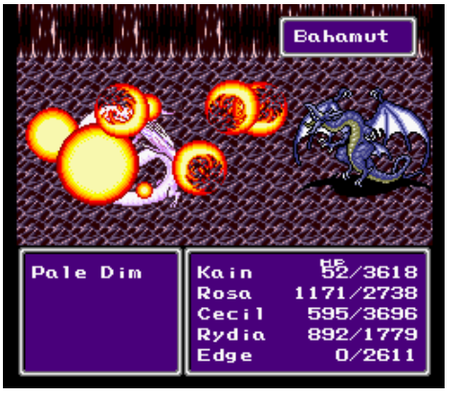
Dark Knight, Cecil and his friend, Kain the Dragoon (or Dragon Knight). Events occur that separate the two, ending up pitting the friends against one another. Players followed Cecil and his fellow adventurers—such as Rosa, Rydia, and the mage twins Palom and Porom—as they endeavored to save the world from impending catastrophe at the hands of mysterious antagonist Golbez. While *Final Fantasy IV*'s plot conforms to now-common RPG tropes, at the time it was a massive step forward for video game storytelling. That said, the characters have stood the test of time and remain some of the most memorable and well-written of the entire series." –Digital Trends (www.digitaltrends.com), which ranked *Final Fantasy II* the 7th best SNES game.



Insider Insight:
My best friend and I had a taste of role-playing games with *Dragon Warrior* and *Final Fantasy* on the NES. But the weekend we rented *Final Fantasy II* showed us what the future of RPGs really was. We rented it early Saturday morning and didn't sleep until the final credits rolled.

Sure, part of the reason was because you just didn't want to take RPGs back to the rental place before you finished them. Who knew if your save file would still be there the next weekend? But really, we just couldn't put *Final Fantasy II* down. The twisting tale of Cecil's redemption kept us going into the wee hours. We went from the planet's surface to the underground kingdom of the dwarves (lali-ho!) all the way to the moon!

We finished the game at about 6 a.m., and we just sat there in silence, jaws on the floor, taking in what we had just witnessed. And then we got some sleep. –Greg Sewart

Insider Insight:
Final Fantasy II was my first entry in the series. I bought it after talking to my good friend, Ben Williams. He was a huge fan of the first game and couldn't wait to play the sequel. When I began playing *FFII*, I felt like it was way over my head. I'm not really a big fan of RPGs, and my previous experience with *Dragon Warrior* left me ill-prepared. Thank goodness the instruction manual came with a strategy guide to get you started, basically walking you through the first hour or two. Ben and I would take turns and use one of the three save slots. We would also watch the other play and offer advice like, "Don't be stupid, fire 3 won't work!"

Final Fantasy II means even more to me now that Ben has passed on. It reminds me of our friendship and how much fun he was to be around. My favorite memory has to be when I was fighting the four fiends and they combined into one. Ben was puzzled and asked, "How do we defeat the four elements if they combine fire, water, earth, and air?" I looked through my massive list of spells and said, "How about nuke?" He said, "Oh yeah, let's try it." After casting nuke a couple of times, the fiend was no more, and we celebrated with soda pop and potato chips." –Stephen Smith

Not for Publication, LTD

Final Fantasy III

PUBLISHER: Square.
DEVELOPER: Square.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Long ago, beings of pure magic ruled the world. Unfortunately, a dispute among these magical entities devolved into the War of the Magi, a conflict that reduced the world to a burned out cinder. Most of the citizens of the world were destroyed, as were the Espers, which were beasts of doom created by the magical beings. Now, centuries later, civilization has been rebuilt with "iron, machines and technology." Espers, who for years only existed in ancient legends, have been discovered, and the forces of magic are starting to return. The potential for another horrible war leaves the future in jeopardy.

You begin *Final Fantasy III* playing as a trio—a pair of soldiers called Viggs and Wedge, along with Terra (called "??????" before she's named), a witch who represents the rebirth of magic. The evil army has tried to command Terra's magical powers, but the Espers ensure that she will escape the army's control. She starts off with moderate magical powers, but as she learns more about herself and her origins, she will learn to morph into a "blazing, spirit-like creature," which has twice the strength of her standard form.

As you progress through this epic saga, you can add characters to your party. Adventuring parties can include up to four fighters, and at times you can form an entirely new party from all of the available fighters. Each character has a special skill. Locke is a treasure hunter who steals. The cute, teddy bear-like Mog does magical dances. Edgar, the King of Figaro Castle, uses machinery and tools. Sabin does "blitz" martial arts moves, while Cyan is a soldier and swordsman. Other potential party members include: Shadow (a ninja who throws objects), Celes (commands a runic blade that absorbs enemy spells), Setzer (a slot machine determines effectiveness of his moves), Strago (learns the spells of enemy attackers), and Relm (sketches enemies and attacks with their powers through her drawings).

Gameplay is similar to previous titles in the series, with gamers traveling from place to place (towns, caves, mountains, and the like) via a world map (riding Chocobos and airships makes this quick and easy), engaging in random turn-based battles, earning experience points for leveling up, and visiting shops to purchase armor, weapons, and other items. New to the series are "relics." You can equip each of your characters with up to two relics, which give them special skills or magical abilities. Also new is a powerful desperation attack move you can use when your character is running low on health. The "job system" is introduced as well, in which your party members can take on different character classes, such as bard, black belt, knight, monk, ninja, ranger, sage, or scholar. Also released for the PlayStation (as *Final Fantasy VI*) and Game Boy Advance (as *Final Fantasy VI Advance*). Known as *Final Fantasy VI* in Japan. Followed by numerous sequels.

Notable Quotable:

Of all the Final Fantasy games ever made, *FFIII* was the best…some of the sharpest visuals ever seen on a 16-bit system. The music was second to none…Everything gameplay-wise in this title just clicked. - *Game Informer* #100 (Aug., 2001)

Insider Insight:

The video game literati know that the Super NES RPG America received as *Final Fantasy III* was, thanks to several Final Fantasy titles having been passed over for localization, actually *Final Fantasy VI*. That isn't mere pedantry, because America's *Final Fantasy III* demonstrated the sort of polish and refinement that comes with multiple iterations of a complex concept. This is role-playing with the rough edges sanded down, yet lacking none of the intricacy and depth of its predecessors.

Roman numerals at the end of a game title can often serve as a warning sign, a flashing beacon that speaks of conceptual fatigue or a dearth of fresh ideas. But this was no *Mega Man 6*. This was the work of a studio in its creative prime, eager to push boundaries and find new meaning for the term "role-playing game." *Final Fantasy III* gave us more than a dozen heroes to recruit, a sweeping tale of empires and rebellions, a skill system tied intricately to the plot…and then it dared to upend the whole thing halfway through, transforming the world, scattering the protagonists, and abandoning the structured linearity of the story progression in favor of an open-ended apocalyptic sandbox.

On top of all of that, *Final Fantasy III* featured the most impressive graphics that had ever appeared in an RPG, all set in a world that freely mixed industrial age tech with otherworldly magic. And the music, composed by series veteran Nobuo Uematsu, was so good that the game featured an entire side-story about it. There aren't many games that take you from singing in an opera to staring down the end of the world in the space of a few hours, but *Final Fantasy III* did, and that was only one of the many things that made it so memorable. –Jeremy Parish

Sniffer Publishing, LTD

Final Fantasy: *Mystic Quest*

PUBLISHER: Square Soft.
DEVELOPER: Square.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

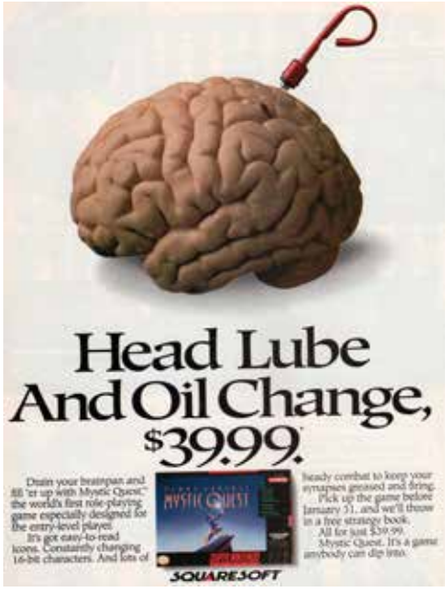
Essentially a role-playing game for beginners, *Final Fantasy: Mystic Quest* has players, on a dying planet, trying to "stop the Dark King from consuming the light from the Crystals of Earth." Said crystals were once locked in Focus Tower, which evil monsters turned from a center for trade and knowledge into a symbol of pure evil. In short, the world was thrown into chaos, with monsters terrorizing people all over. Enter Benjamin, a youngster who longs to be a hero.

In this game, you perform such typical RPG staples as turn-based battles, leveling up with experience points, opening chests to retrieve items, talking to townspeople, and exploring fantastical settings, including maze-like dungeons. During battles (which aren't random), you select from such commands as attack, defend, item, and spells. The overworld map offers such predictable locations as caves, castles, forests, and towers, but you can't choose your path to reach them, resulting in less exploration than most games of this type.

During your quest, other characters can join your party (controlled manually or automatically by the computer), but you can only have one ally at a time. While many of these allies are stronger than your character, they don't grow in strength and ability as you do, and their weapons and abilities remain the same. You, on the other hand, can collect different types of armor and weaponry, including swords, axes, claws, bombs, grenades, and ninja stars. Weapons can be used for things other than fighting, such as the axe for cutting trees and mushrooms that block your pathway.

There are three types of magic you can use in *Mystic Quest*: white, black, and wizard, each of which has four different spells, such as cure, heal, quake, meteor, fire, and/or thunder. Helpful items include healing potions, seeds (for recovering magic points), wakewater (for melting evil ice), keys, a mask (for seeing through gas), a magic mirror (for seeing invisible monsters), crests (for warping), and more. You can save your progress at any point in the game. If you die in battle, you can retry the fight, but any items that you used will be gone.

Retro Gamer Publishing, LLC



Insider Insight:
It was Christmas of 1993, and my brother was set to get a Super Nintendo. My grandparents, who raised me, got me an NES a few years earlier, and of course they had this rule about only buying one game system per person once—forever. My brother and I didn't live together, but I knew about his gift weeks before, as the box sat in my kitchen, unwrapped, waiting to get packed and mailed, laughing at me. Mocking me.

Despite all my logical arguments to have an SNES that any court of appeal would have upheld, I didn't persuade my grandparents, and I never got an SNES, but my brother did, and he loved it. Then, the following summer, my brother came to visit for a month and brought it with him, along with all of his games, including an RPG called *Mystic Quest* that also had *Final Fantasy* in the title. Now, the original *Final Fantasy* for the NES changed me in so many ways, but I had no idea that there were more games in the franchise. Oh, baby! It was Game On, full tilt!

I spent the first week of his visit playing *Mystic Quest* and fell in love with turn-based RPGs all over again. And my bro was right there with me. He didn't play it too much at first, as it was a bit too complex for him at his age, but seeing me enjoying it changed his tune. The game gave us something to bond over, talk about, and experience. *Mystic Quest* remains the only SNES game I've beaten because it's hard for me to imagine playing that system without him playing, too. I may not have gotten the Christmas present I wanted, but I got memories and experiences that can't be bought or duplicated. That's playing with Super Power! –Rob McCallum

Insider Insight:
Nothing beats getting a new game as a gift. Whether it's a highly anticipated new title, or one you've simply wanted to add to your collection for some time, there truly is nothing like scanning a stack of wrapped presents, searching for that all-too-familiar shape, hoping against hope, and getting exactly what you want.

The occasion was my brother's birthday, and after months of us renting *Final Fantasy: Mystic Quest* over and over again, he finally owned it. The smile on his face that day was beaming into his oversized glasses. Our on-again, off-again adventures up to that point had landed us outside of Pazuzu's Tower, with all of our previous adventures throughout the World Map being pedestrian for the most part. The puzzles presented at Falls Basin and the Ice Pyramid did little to prepare us for the convoluted trek up Pazuzu's Tower.

We hung over the controller in rapture, our eyes unblinkingly glued to the screen. After throwing down our last Aero spell, Pazuzu fell and left us knocking at the final door within Focus Tower that would lead us into the bowels of Doom Castle, where the Dark King held sway. Our mouths fell agape as we climbed, knocking down all-too-familiar foes and barely defeating the second coming of the Vile Four.

After a transcendent walk up to the Dark King's throne, we engaged him in a battle of epic proportions, launching spell after spell of White and Flare. It wasn't until years later that we found out that he could be beaten with a handful of Benjamin's Cure spells, but I don't think that knowledge would do much to reattach the roof that got torn off the day we finally beat *Final Fantasy: Mystic Quest*. –Lumpz T. Clown

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Final Fight

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

Crime-ridden, gang-infested Metro City has elected a new mayor, but he's different than those that have come before. He is Mike Haggar, former professional wrestler and street fighter. The gangs fail in their attempt to bribe him, so the Mad Gear gang kidnaps his daughter Jessica. To exact revenge and rescue her, Haggar and his friend Cody (a fifth-degree black belt in Karate) must fight their way through five sections of the city: Slum, Subway/Park, Westside, Bay Area, and Uptown.

This is a one-player port of the 1989 Capcom coin-op beat-'em-up. Gameplay is mostly solid, but while the arcade original has three playable characters (in addition to two-player simultaneous action), the SNES version has only two, dropping Guy. Other differences include a maximum of three onscreen enemies at once, no Industrial Area level, no female enemies, changed boss names (Damned is now Thrasher, Sodom is called Katana), and no "whiskey" power-up. In addition, the cry of "Oh My God!" was changed to "Oh My Car!"

As either Mike or Cody, you use punches, kicks, jump-kicks, throws, and other moves to battle the bad guys, including bosses Thrasher (a blond bully), Katana (a sword-swinging samurai), EDI-E (a corrupt police officer), and Abigail (a brawny bruiser). You can employ super moves that hit every enemy around you, but at the cost of a small percentage of your health. You can also uncover a variety of useful items by beating down thugs or destroying phone booths, billboards, and barrels. Said items include pizza, grapes, apples, and other food for health; jewelry and cash for points; and knives, pipes, swords, and other weapons for fighting thugs. The Sega CD version, called *Final Fight CD*, retains Guy and the two-player mode. The Game Boy Advance cartridge, which also includes Guy and two-player action, is called *Final Fight One*.

Insider Insight:
Given that I never owned it during the SNES's heyday, *Final Fight* may be a surprising choice for one of my favorite games on the system. But I played it almost every weekend at my friend Kevin's house, and from our perspective no fighting game could touch it until *Street Fighter II* came out the following year. Of course, *Final Fight* is also a lengthy side-scroller, and it's a tough game, made even harder (and admittedly less fun) by the lack of a simultaneous two-player option. And since you're forced to pick, there's the dilemma of which character to choose: stronger but slower Mike Haggar, or quicker but smaller Cody. But even with its flaws, the action and graphics are incredible, and how can you not love facing enemies named for (and clearly modeled after) Axl Rose, Slash, and Andre the Giant? (But a boss dude named Abigail? Didn't expect that one.)

I always thought the game's premise was fairly pedestrian: Mad Gear gang kidnaps Haggar's daughter Jessica and now he has to rescue her. But today, as the father of three daughters, I get it—picture yourself as Haggar and kick some Mad Gear tuchas! And I did indeed favor Haggar back in the day, while Kevin often chose Cody. We persisted, too, each eventually finishing the game with our respective character. I still remember the exhilaration of finally knocking out Mad Gear boss Belger at the end and watching him fly through the breaking window to his demise. For a pair of thirteen-year-olds playing the game for what seemed like endless hours, it truly felt like an incredible accomplishment. –Shane Stein

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Final Fight 2

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

This SNES console sequel to *Final Fight* takes place several years after the original game, with the Mad Gear Gang having kidnapped Guy's master, Genryusai, and his daughter, Rena. As Mike Haggar, or as Maki or Carlos, you must battle your way through six stages to rescue the victims: Hong Kong, France, Holland, England, Italy, and Japan. After enduring complaints about the first game, Capcom wisely added a two-player mode, so you and a friend can fight the bad guys together.

Strongman Haggar is a former wrestler and street fighter with the following moves: head butt, jump kick, body press, suplex, spinning piledriver, and spinning clothesline (his super move). Maki, a master of ninjitsu who is quick, can do an over-the-shoulder throw, a jump kick, a flying kick, a flying elbow, a knee bash, an off the wall kick, and a spinning handstand kick (her super move). Carlos, a mixed martial artist and swordsman, does a back roll toss, jump kick, flying kick, flying fist punch, knee bash, and sword attack (his super move).

Super moves dish out major damage but delete some of your health. For assistance, you can pick up food for health, along with weapons (knives, nightsticks, and 2x4s) for battling baddies, including bosses Won Won (a Chinese chef), Freddie (a former Navy SEAL), Bratken (an overgrown psycho who plays with toys), Phillipe (a circus clown with a cane), and Rolent (a special forces reject).

Notable Quotable:

"*Final Fight 2* is a fighter to be reckoned with, but it's not a knockout. You'll want to take it on for the thrills of two-player Final Fighting, but the gameplay's predictable, the music's weak and the enemies are bums. This isn't the fight to end all fights, and we hope the next 'Final Fight' installment is better." –*GamePro* (July 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"Never in my life have I seen such a boring, uninspired collection of stages. Each takes place in a different area of the world, so you'd expect to see some exotic scenery, right? But no, you find yourself in an airport in Hong Kong, a construction site in France, a sewer in Germany, and a train depot in England! Ugh! And then there's the difficulty level, which is absolutely pathetic. The first *Final Fight* was easy enough, but this one is a complete cakewalk, constantly awarding you with new lives and piling on six continues . . . Far too easy and repetitive . . . You'll probably switch off *Final Fight 2* long before you've exhausted your lives." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:

If you owned a Super Nintendo in the '90s, *Final Fight* was your answer to the Sega Genesis's *Streets of Rage*. While some might argue graphics, sound, and gameplay, all I cared about was whether or not the game featured two-player co-op and/or Mike Haggar. I was disappointed to learn that the original *Final Fight* on the SNES did not support two players simultaneously, so you can imagine my excitement when *Final Fight 2* corrected this shortcoming. As a single-player experience, most side-scrolling brawlers never truly shine.

Thanks to the multiplayer option, *Final Fight 2* is forever cemented in my mind as a joyous experience. Some of my favorite memories as a young teenager involve hanging out with my best friend (RIP Justin Kimble, 1981–2000), staying up all night playing beat-'em-ups like *Final Fight 2*, eating terrible pizza, and drinking soda until morning. From the shared excitement of finally beating a difficult boss, to the frustration of friendly fire, *Final Fight 2* is a roller coaster ride that is best enjoyed with a friend.

Thanks to a cheat code, *Final Fight 2* allowed both players to use Mike Haggar at the same time! This brings me to the ancient bit of wisdom that governed much of my early teen years: "Always be yourself, unless you can be Mike Haggar. Then always be Mike Haggar." –Jon D. Harrison

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Final Fight 3

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

In the wake of the defeat of the Mad Gear Gang, a smaller group called Skull Cross has taken their place, wreaking havoc across Metro City. Four heroes, selectable by the player, vow to thwart this up-and-coming gang. Mayor Mike Haggar, trained in ninjitsu, can do the following moves: wrestling throw, body press, suplex, back flip drop, spinning piledriver, spinning clothesline, violent axe, and final hammer (his super move, which only works when the meter reads "super"). Guy, experienced in street fighting and ninjitsu, does elbow drops, wall leaps, body throws, back pins, knee drops, fireballs, and 1,000 fist barrages (his super move). Detective Lucia, who has super strong legs, can do a suplex, knee slam, knee drop, fire spinner, tornado spinner, hurricane spinner, and hard hit knee (her super move). Dean, a former street fighter with insider info on the Skull Cross gang, does an electric combo, a lightning move, a distance grab, a slam throw, a back breaker, an electric shock, and a scrap dunk (his super move). The characters can also punch, jump-kick, and do dash attacks and reverse grabs.

To help our heroes in their beat-'em-up battle through six rounds of play (plus two bonus stages), they can grab food (for health) and four different types of weapons: nunchuks, steel pipes, Billy clubs, and hammers, the last of which can only be thrown. In addition to standard thugs, you'll battle such bosses as Dave (a former policeman who does a jump attack), Caine (who attacks with a wrench), and Drake (a fisherman who attacks with his anchor). You can go solo, team up with a friend, or select the innovative Auto 2P Play mode, which is a one-player game in which the second character is controlled by the computer. Released in Japan as *Final Fight Tough*.

Notable Quotable:

"The 'Final Fight' series is getting old quickly. Granted, the new features like the two-player computer mode and special moves for the characters are a nice touch, but repetitive enemies and backgrounds plague this game. The game does not have the look or feel of the arcade as the other 'Final Fight' games did, possibly due to the 'blah' graphics. Sorry to say that *Final Fight* was good in the past, but nowadays, it's just old and boring." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1996)

Insider Insight:

Oh, *Final Fight*. My favorite beat-'em-up series of all time just got better and better throughout the lifespan of the SNES. While *Final Fight 3* does have its detractors, they are mostly of the opinion that the game didn't do enough to push the series forward, which I suppose is fair. But let's take a step back and realize that this genre wasn't ever going to win innovation awards. This was about walking through various locales, beating people up, hanging with your friends, and rocking sweet green bicycle shorts and a ponytail.

Final Fight 3 did add a few wrinkles to the formula, namely the ability to dash and perform a dash attack. Capcom also added the ability to have a computer-controlled second player so that, on the occasion a friend wasn't able to come over, two player co-op could still happen. *Final Fight 3* was a favorite among my group of friends, and one that we continue to bust out well into adulthood. –Dan Ryan

Insider Insight:

Final Fight 3 is my favorite brawler for the SNES, but it happened in a roundabout way. Since the game was released in 1995, I was already in that transitional phase of waiting for the Nintendo 64 and PlayStation to hit the scene, so I wasn't even aware that Capcom was making a third installment. Fast forward a few months to my fourteenth birthday, and along with getting an N64, I opened a brand new copy of *Final Fight 3*—I could barely believe what I was seeing!

I first experienced the franchise at my local video game store, which had a *Fight Fight* arcade cabinet, and I was blown away by it. *Double Dragon* and *Renegade* were my go-to brawlers, but *Final Fight* stunned me with its realistic sprite design. On console, I enjoyed playing *Final Fight* 1 and 2, but usually gravitated towards the Streets of Rage series on the Genesis since those games seemed to have more depth. However, that changed once I played *Final Fight 3*. The inclusion of move sets from the Street Fighter II series, the super bar for combos, and branching level paths had me sold. I always loved the lore of the Final Fight series, and it was refreshing to see the Skull Cross gang as the new villains with some older Mad Gear recruits like the Andore Clan and Edi.E. Today the cart is a bit on the expensive side, but for any fan of 16-bit brawlers, it's a must-own! –Adam Shub

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Final Fight Guy

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

The Super Nintendo port of Capcom's 1989 coin-op beat-'em-up, *Final Fight*, lacked four major components: female enemies, the Industrial Area level, the two-player option (the most egregious omission), and the ability to fight as Guy, the ninpō master of Japanese descent who knows the Bushin form of ninjutsu. First released in Japan in 1992, *Final Fight Guy* for the Super Famicom rectified just one of those shortcomings, bringing Guy back onboard, explaining his absence in the storyline. Unfortunately, they left Cody out this time and didn't add the other things. In 1994, *Final Fight Guy* was released in the U.S. as a rental exclusive through Blockbuster, making the game very hard to find today, especially complete in box.

Notable Quotable:

"The major qualm I have with *Final Fight Guy* is that it simply isn't ambitious enough. I find it to be a fun way to kill a little time every once in a while, but I have to admit that I find it to be a bit disappointing due to Capcom's laziness. This game came out in America nearly three years after the first *Final Fight*. With the way developers were getting more and more out of the available memory in an SNES cartridge, you know they could have at least made an honest attempt at making the game more faithful to the arcade original. But instead, they simply replaced Cody and his move set with Guy and his. While that in itself is an improvement (Haggar is a slow guy with a ton of strength, making the 'lightning-quick' Guy the perfect alternative to him), I can't help but think Capcom could have done so much more." –Rob Hamilton (www.honestgamers.com)

Insider Insight:

I've never played this game. I don't even know that much about it. My only real "memory" regarding *Final Fight Guy* is shelving it every so often in my days as a Blockbuster Video employee. Plus, I thought the name was dumb. No one told me that the game was only available as a Blockbuster-exclusive rental. Because of that limited availability, a complete-in-box copy of the game (not even shrink-wrapped) can sell for upwards of a grand these days. As an employee, I could have actually purchased one for myself. But I didn't. Damn . . . –Chris Baker

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Firepower 2000

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft.
DEVELOPER: Sales Curve Ltd.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

Notable Quotable:

"*FP 2000* is worth a look, especially if you're a hardcore shooter fan. This game rates high, as the attention to detail and graphics are amazing, even rivaling the Neo Geo . . . The only drawback is the difficulty. Still, it's a good addition to any SNES library." – *GameFan Magazine* (January 1993)

An "underground race" on a remote island in the Mid-Atlantic Ocean has constructed a powerful military force. To stop them, you'll pilot a jeep, which can fire in all directions and jump, but is slow and vulnerable to ground-based attacks; and a helicopter, which moves quickly and can fly over surface threats (such as lava pits and mines), but can only fire straight ahead. Most enjoyably, the two-player mode lets one gamer drive the jeep while the other player flies the helicopter.

You'll work your way through six levels—The Desert, The Jungle, The River Bed (where the jeep becomes a speedboat), The Military Air-Base, The Volcanoes, and The Enemy Complex—using bullets, flames, plasma, lasers, and ionics (a weapon that splits in two) to shoot such enemies as choppers, tanks, jets, and rocket launchers. By collecting red tokens with letters on them, you can equip special weapons: homing missiles, x missiles (which destroy everything in their path), and scorch (which explode into a ring of fire). You can also grab bubbles (shields) and stars (for extra points). Known as *Super SWIV* overseas, *Firepower 2000* is a follow-up to *Silkworm* and *SWIV* for home computers.

Insider Insight:

Growing up, I wasn't much of a shooter fan. During the summer, my friend Curtis would come over and bring a couple of his SNES games for us to play. One day he brought over *Firepower 2000*. This was one of the only multiplayer co-op games that he had, so we decided to give it a whirl. I played as the little green tank, and he was the chopper. We played the game for hours that day, and I asked him if I could borrow it for the week, as we did this from time to time. Unfortunately, the game was way too hard for me to play on my own, so it wasn't much fun. So when he came by the next week, we continued our little bro-fest and played it some more.

I remember that we were frustrated by the difficulty level, so we decided to whip out the Game Genie, which made it much more fun. Unlimited lives were a must, and fully upgraded weapons made it downright hilarious. We had a great time with this one, and I'll always remember the fun times we had. It's one of the only shoot-'em-ups that I ever enjoyed. –Raymond Fix

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FireStriker

PUBLISHER: DTMC.
DEVELOPER: Axes Art Amuse.
GAME TYPE: Ball-and-Paddle/Adventure, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

A cross of sorts between *Arkanoid* and *The Legend of Zelda*, *FireStriker* may not look like a ball-and-paddle game (there's no actual paddle, and the setting is a fantasy land, where four kingdoms are governed by four constantly fighting tribes), but it sure borrows elements from that genre, along with components of pinball and adventure as well. You begin the game controlling a human soldier named Slader, who uses his Ethereal Striker Sword to hit a ball of light (called a "Trialight") that bounces around the screen, destroying enemies (bats, demons, bosses, etc.), breaking through obstacles (bricks and the like), and opening doors and treasure chests. You lose a life if you let the ball escape through a broken block at the bottom of the playfield.

While working your way upward (the top-down action scrolls vertically), you can rescue other FireStrikers you can then control: Eno, a fast Griffon soldier who blasts the ball with his wings; Loa, a trident-wielding mermaid; and Garum, who is large but slow. Collecting POW power-ups lets you Power Strike the ball, sending it through several bricks at once. Levels, some of which require such objectives as killing all the enemies or destroying certain objects, comprise several screens and are entered from a world map. Up to four players can join in for two mini-games: Soccer-type Game, which offers six fields, and Survival Game, which has four. The graphics don't do the SNES justice, but *FireStriker* is an interesting mix of genres. Cheap deaths occur, but the game is easy to beat. Released as *Holy Striker* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"*FireStriker*'s fourteen complex playfields aren't overly detailed, but they offer plenty of barrier bustin'. The ball responds like a pinball and is easy to follow, though you sometimes lose track of it when the screen scrolls upward. The sound nicely underscores the action." –*GamePro* (November 1994)

Schiffer Publishing

First Samurai

PUBLISHER: Kemco.
DEVELOPER: Vivid Image.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

As a shirtless warrior with a ponytail and purple pants, you are the first samurai in the history of Japan. You begin the game equipped only with punches and kicks. Shortly after play begins, you will acquire a sword that makes a quick, overhead slashing motion for hacking through walls and battling various bug creatures, monsters, flying pests, ghostly apparitions, thugs, and evil martial arts experts. You can also pick up such throwing weapons as axes, bombs, and tri-blades.

You walk through the villages, towns, and dungeons at a normal pace, but you can jump high and climb walls. When you defeat an enemy, it will release energy that you will absorb. When you ring a magic bell in the proper place, a wizard mage will appear and help you by removing obstacles or creating platforms. Magic pots serve as checkpoints, and you can replenish your health by eating food and drinking sake. You essentially have two health bars, one for your character and one for your main weapon. If you run out of energy, your sword energy will transfer to revive you and you will lose your sword. The action begins during the early 1700s and continues to a dystopian Tokyo circa 1999. The objective in each level of *First Samurai* is to collect five symbol items so you can face a boss.

Notable Quotable:

"The balancing act of keeping yourself alive and keeping your sword by your side is part of what drives the action in this game, with the other part being how to maintain progress and exploration. Both components shine during the first level, especially when paired with the enemy-attacking spiked satellite that tags along with the samurai and the Handel music that plays when the samurai finds a picnic basket full of food. Seeing such witty details introduced early makes it the more sobering to find that after the first level, *First Samurai* starts to become dull . . . The game turns out to be a shaggy collect-a-thon where the player must go through increasingly wider boards, with plenty of grinding associated with basic combat . . . the need to find every last necessary item gets overbearing . . . Later stages in the game become mired in obnoxious item placement and difficult enemies." –Bill Hensel, a.k.a. John Legendoffzelda (playingwithsuperpower.com)

Super Retro Publishing

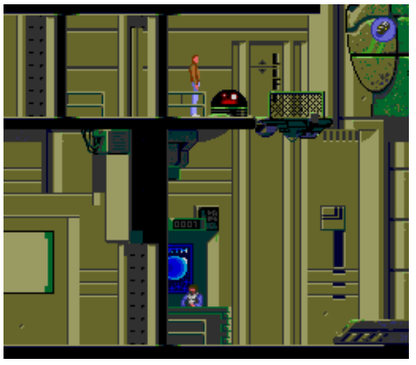
Flashback:
The Quest for Identity

PUBLISHER: U.S. Gold.
DEVELOPER: Delphine Software.
GAME TYPE: Adventure/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Packaged with a fourteen-page Marvel comic book, *Flashback* is set in a dystopian, cyberpunk future. Players guide secret agent Conrad Hart as he journeys through seven cinematic levels—Planet Titan, New Washington, Cyber Tower, Earth, The Secret Base of Paradise, Planet of the Morphs, and Nuclear Detonator—shooting aliens, humans, and robots. Conrad is exceptionally agile, meaning he can run, jump, crouch, climb, turn somersaults, and hang on ledges, all beautifully illustrated via rotoscoped animation. Conrad must also solve puzzles, trigger switches, dodge obstacles, talk to characters, gather information, activate pressure pads, ride elevators, and more. Items he can use include stones (which can be thrown or placed), keys, teleporters, shields, mechanical mice (which advance along the ground setting off cameras and pressure pads), force fields, and ID cards, among others.

Based on the Amiga computer game, *Flashback* was also released for several other consoles, including the Jaguar. Thanks to Nintendo's family-friendly policies, the SNES version was altered in certain ways. For example, New Washington's bar became a cafe, while Death Tower was renamed Cyber Tower. The enemy mutants, who had natural skin tones in other versions, were recolored green. The SNES game also suffers from slowdown, and the Genesis version has better music than its 16-bit rival, which is unusual. The 3DO, Sega CD, and CD-i versions are enhanced with movie-like cinema scenes and more voice effects, but the CD-i game, which lacks the "The Quest for Identity" subtitle, has slowdown and a smaller playfield (thanks to vertical bars on the sides of the screen). Similar to *Out of this World* and *Prince of Persia*. Followed by *Fade to Black* (PlayStation).

Insider Insight:
"Wow!" I actually said this the first time I played *Flashback*, and surprisingly, I still feel the same way to this day. Yes, it is a platformer. Yes, that had already been done countless times before. But this game was different. The character moved so naturally, gravity felt so real, and there were no super powers or jet boosters or mechanical arms: just a man with a gun. Playing the game today might leave some wanting for a more complex story, or a more intricate inventory system, but *Flashback* was about charging ahead into whatever challenge the next screen offered. An unfolding story used to answer the character's questions, a dark ending, and variable difficulty all created an adult experience without resorting to graphic violence or sexual themes. This game has been remade, remastered, and repackaged, but the original is not only nostalgic, it is art.
–Andy Slaven



Schiffer Publishing, Ltd

The Flintstones

PUBLISHER: Ocean of America.
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

Based on the 1994 live-action movie, which was inspired by the classic prime time cartoon (1960–1966), *The Flintstones* has players, as a rather John Goodman-esque Fred Flintstone, working their way through five multi-stage levels—Quarry, Bedrock, Jungle, Volcanic, and Machine—using a club to bat away such enemies as cavemen, frogs, dinosaurs, and orangutans. Fred can also roll bowling balls and throw rocks, but jumping is not a weapon. In addition, he pulls himself up onto ledges, climbs up chains, smashes rocks to reveal items, ducks under projectiles, pushes rocks down hills to make a platform for reaching higher areas, rides moving platforms while dodging sawblades, surfs on waves of lava, jumps over lava, jumps from vine to vine, and jumps on rocks that bob up and down.

In Bedrock, a highly unorthodox level, Fred drives his car along the bottom of the screen, bouncing Pebbles and Bam Bam off the top of the car and up toward the items and platforms above. Barney, Wilma, Betty, Dino, and the evil Cliff Vandercave also appear. The Flintstones theme song plays during the title/selection screen, and Fred yells his patented "Yabba Dabba Doo!" The SNES game is much different than the Game Boy adaptation of the film, which starred John Goodman (Fred), Elizabeth Perkins (Wilma), Rick Moranis (Barney), and Rosie O'Donnell (Betty).

Notable Quotable:

"*The Flintstones* is yet another quality movie license from Ocean. This platformer is definitely on the difficult side, but it has the graphics and play mechanics to keep you glued. It's a way better game than it was a movie. The art and detail is again, great, but the bopping techno soundtrack seemed a little out of place." –*GameFan Magazine* (January 1995)

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

The Flintstones:
The Treasure of Sierra Madrock

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Taito.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1994.

In many ways, *The Treasure of Sierra Madrock* is formatted like a standard cute, cartoon-based platformer. Players, controlling Fred Flintstone or Barney Rubble, journey through prehistoric worlds (including Bedrock, caves, jungles, icy areas, and the like), jumping on platforms (holding down the button makes them hover for a bit), jumping over obstacles (spikes, lava, etc.), swimming across rivers, climbing trees and stone pillars, and riding moving platforms. Players also bust barrels to uncover such items as 1-ups, clams (for shopping), hearts (for increasing the life bar), apples (energy), stars (one hundred grants an extra life), and dodo egg sandwiches (for filling in hit points). To defeat the dinosaurs, armadillos, bats, Water Buffalo members, and other enemies they'll encounter, Fred and Barney each wield a wooden club.

What separates the cartridge from the pack is a board game-like world map, where you role a virtual die to move Fred or Barney on the board. Depending on the space landed on, you must perform a task, such as defeat a boss, enter a shop, or clear a level in a particular world. Wilma and Betty sometimes appear, dragging their respective husband back a few spaces on the board. There are also mini-games, including match-o-matic, monkey shines (hit see-saws to keep monkeys from taking your coconuts up the trees), and Mode 7 third-person racing. Based on *The Flintstones* cartoon series, which originally aired in prime time from 1960–1966.

Fun Fact:
The title *The Treasure of Sierra Madrock* is a spoof of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, the 1948 adventure/drama starring Humphrey Bogart and Walter Huston. The film was based on B. Traven's 1927 novel of the same name.

Notable Quotable:
"*The Flintstones: The Treasure of Sierra Madrock* is kind of cool. Although it seems a bit strange having to roll an on-screen die to move around the map, the concept is different. The graphics are nice and cartoony, while the music is very catchy. However, there are some complaints. The game really slows down at odd points in the levels, and the game is very easy to beat. Other than that, *The Flintstones* is a decent Super NES title." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1994)

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Football Fury

PUBLISHER: American Sammy Corporation.
DEVELOPER: Aicom.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

Displayed from an angled/overhead, horizontal perspective, *Football Fury* features two leagues in the fictional United Football Network: the United States Football Conference (USFC) and the American All-Star Football Conference (AAFC). Each league is divided into Eastern, Central, and Western divisions, and each is populated with teams from real NFL cities of the era. Teams have such fictional, but inspired-by-the-NFL names as the Pittsburgh Metals (subbing for the Steelers) and the New York Titans (in place of the Giants).

During the gridiron action, players select from such offensive plays as pro-I, T-formation, and Q.B. option, and such defensive plays as wing, shotgun, man-to-man, and full blitz. You can play the game against the computer or a human opponent. Known as *Ultimate Football: Try Formation!* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"Younger football fans, and anybody overwhelmed by complex video football games, will welcome American Sammy's *Football Fury*. Touted as 'user-friendly football,' this SNES game simplifies the play options and the control to keep the emphasis on the action . . . The sprites, which are ill-defined and cartoony, tend to be too sluggish for serious gamers, but younger players might not mind. As for realistic sounds, such as a crunching hit, you'll find that they're kept to a minimum. Rookies will be entertained by *Football Fury*, but they'll eventually want to jump to the real NFL with *Madden* or *Montana*. Till then, this is a nice game to train on." – Gamefabrique (gamefabrique.com)

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Foreman for Real

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Software Creations.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Boxing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

At first glance, *Foreman for Real* is a wonder to behold, thanks to motion capture technology. The digitized fighters, including former Heavy Weight Champion George Foreman himself, look real, and the game boasts smooth animation. After a few minutes of play, however, gamers will notice the cart's many faults, most notably its sluggish controls and dearth of on-screen information (you have to pause the game just to check health status). Even the graphics wear thin in short order as the color palette is limited, the boxers' bodies appear interchangeable, and their faces are strangely expressionless (though they do jerk to the side when hit).

The behind-the-fighter view evokes *Super Punch-Out!!* to some degree, and players can select from a variety of fictional boxers (plus a super powerful Foreman), each rated according to power, speed, stamina, offense, and defense. Passwords save Career and Tournament progress. According to *GamePro*, the SNES version is faster than the Genesis game, even though the SNES cart is slow as well. Also released for the Game Boy and Game Gear.

Notable Quotable:

"When you press the button there is a delayed response, upsetting the rhythm and balance of the fight . . . quick punches like jabs feel like you have weights in your gloves, destroying the sense of speed and need for quick reaction. It appears that the developers spent more time worrying about the motion captured graphics than creating a great playing game, simulation or otherwise. *Boxing Legends of the Ring* outclasses this game in every respect aside from the graphics, but even this area it isn't a knockout. That's a shame, too, because with faster gameplay and better control 'it coulda been a contenda.'" –All Game Guide (formerly at allgame.com)

Retro Publishing LTD

Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Iguana Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

One of the first baseball games to use motion-captured 3D graphics, *Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball* features more than 700 authentic Major Leaguers, each rated according to the 1994 baseball season. There are no real team names, but the game does offer seven modes of play: CPU vs. CPU, Exhibition, Home Run Derby, Playoffs, Season, Clutch Time (featuring sixteen different scenarios), and Quick Play (one strike and you're out). The game is viewed from the catcher's perspective, but once the ball is hit into play the camera elevates to a three-quarter look at the field. There are twenty-eight stadiums, each rendered in 3D.

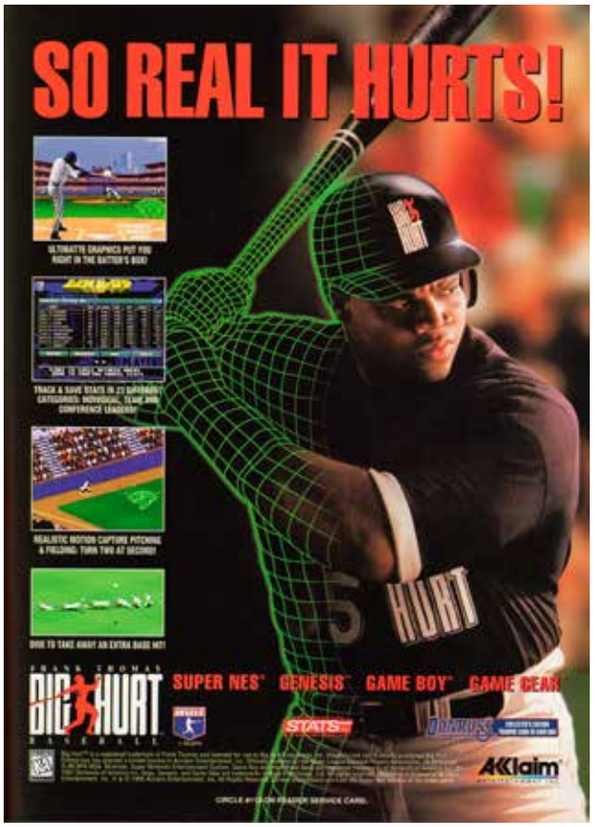
Other options and features include: run downs, squeezes, stolen bases, high spikes, bad hops, rain delays, double play pivots, adjustable lineups and fielders, three pitching heights and speeds, pitchers that tire and have hot/cold streaks, and battery backup for twenty-three statistical categories. Also released for the Genesis, Game Boy, Game Gear, PlayStation, and Saturn.

Notable Quotable:

"Combining simulation aspects with a traditional baseball game, *Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball* shows signs of innovative but flawed thinking. Most of the simulation aspects are in the pitching, which quickly becomes a tiresome chore. The rest of the game is a subpar replica of several other baseball titles." –*Next Generation* (January 1996)

Notable Quotable:

"*Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball* is loaded with the nifty options and gameplay components [but the] graphics are passable at best, with decent player animations and accurately rendered ballparks (though it's anyone's guess why Fenway's Green Monster is brown). Players in the field are small and rather unimpressive, but the batter is a marvel of size and detail. Filling up nearly three-quarters of the TV screen, from bottom to top, each photorealistic batter features uniform wrinkles, visible belt loops, dead-on skin tones, and sweatbands worthy of a Topps baseball card . . . Gameplay mechanics are a mixed bag, with pitching and fielding responding well to the control, and batting registering as the game's worst element. As in the Majors, it's almost necessary to begin a swing as soon as the pitcher releases the ball—there's no time to determine if the pitch is even going to be near the plate. The lack of player control makes batting a rather boring affair, and that's a serious drawback for a baseball game." –Jeff Kitts (www.gamespot.com)



Scarfet Publishing, LTD

Frantic Flea

PUBLISHER: GameTek.
DEVELOPER: Haus Teknikka.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1996.

Hampered by blind jumps, minimalist backgrounds, and a lame Tasmanian Devil-like spin attack (the only weapon available), *Frantic Flea* is one of the lesser SNES platformers. To protect Flea World from an evil race of bugs called the Insideos, players guide a cartoonlike bug warrior through six brightly colored zones (Whacky Labs, Stikko Hills, Boing Central, Manik Mountains, First Fortress, and Inside the Destruktokon), gathering up fleas within a given time limit. The fleas will follow you around as you go, sort of like the little birds in *Flicky* (arcade, Genesis), but *Flicky* is a much better game. Stikko suction pads (for clinging to walls and ceilings), hoverpods (for flying), and other such objects lend some variety to the platforming action, and the jazzy soundtrack and quirky sound effects are fun, but gameplay is more of a chore than an amusement.

Notable Quotable:

"*Frantic Flea* puts another nail in the Super NES coffin with uninteresting gameplay, horrible cartoon-like graphics, obnoxious and monotonous music, and annoying, imprecise controls." –*GamePro* (April 1996)

Notable Quotable:

"What we were trying to show is that despite 16-bit graphical limitations you can actually make a video game look like a cartoon. We wanted *FF* to look like a '50s or '60s Warner Bros. cartoon and to have the same zany feel, almost Dr. Seuss-like which nobody has tried before in a video game." –Andy Whitehurt, creative director at Haus Teknikka (*Electronic Gaming Monthly*, April 1996)

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Frogger

PUBLISHER: Majesco.
DEVELOPER: Morning Star Multimedia.
GAME TYPE: Action, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1998.

Frogger for the Super Nintendo has a couple of features the Genesis version lacks, namely a high-score board (which is non-savable) and "enhanced" graphics (I prefer the look of the original). However, the Genesis port, which accurately brings home the 1981 Sega arcade classic, is a much better game, thanks in large part to the SNES rendition's complete lack of music, meaning you won't be hearing 16-bit versions of "Camptown Races" or "Yankee Doodle."

The simple four-way control in *Frogger* has players maneuvering a frog across a busy highway (the bottom half of the screen) and then across a river bustling with activity. The challenge lies in avoiding vehicles that move at various speeds and using good timing to hop on logs, turtles (some of which sink), and the backs of alligators. Edible flies appearing in bays and amorous lady frogs that sometimes rest on logs can be jumped on for extra points, but you should watch out for alligators popping up in bays and otters that swim up behind logs (the latter in later levels). The infinitely repeating goal is to jump a frog into each of the five home bays positioned across the top of the playfield.

The last commercially licensed SNES release in the U.S., *Frogger* has appeared on numerous consoles. The coin-op classic spawned numerous remakes and sequels, including *Frogger* (PlayStation), *Frogger II: Threeedeep!* (Atari 2600, 5200, ColecoVision), *Frogger 2* (Game Boy Color), and *Frogger: Ancient Shadow* (GameCube, PS2, Xbox), among others.

Insider Insight:
Who doesn't like *Frogger*? There is magic in its simplicity, and helping a short, squat-bodied, tailless amphibian proves to be quite addictive and entertaining. I grew up watching the animated Frogger segment as part of CBS' *Saturday Supercade* cartoon lineup. I played Coleco's mini arcade tabletop game. Heck, I even spun Buckner & Garcia's "Froggy's Lament" on my record player in 1982. So when the Konami arcade classic jumped to the Super Nintendo years later in 1998, I gleefully hopped on board.

Plain and simple: the SNES port is a no-thrills version of *Frogger*. It controls well enough, but that is the limit of kind words I have to say about this version of the game. Graphically, while having access to a much larger color palette, the game is dramatically changed—but not for the better. Despite having a much faster processor compared to the coin-op original, it offers nothing new. It even lacks the catchy musical jingle we've all been humming over the years.

It should be noted that *Frogger* was the final game released for the Super Nintendo in North America. Oh, the irony that such a classic of the golden age of video arcade games, ported poorly, became the last stand for the technological marvel that was the Super Nintendo. The biggest travesty of all is that even the SNES version of the game didn't answer the nagging question, "Why can't the frog swim?" –Michael Thomasson

Insider Insight:
I remember seeing *Frogger* at the arcades and on our Commodore 64, watching over someone's shoulder and thinking I could dodge those cars more skillfully. I didn't start playing on my own until the SNES port and soon realized how wrong I was. It was a frustrating game and the closest I've come to chucking a controller in defeat. With *Frogger*, there was a struggle between crossing the road and river as fast as I could and being patient enough to wait for the perfect gap or a log to float by. That tension was addictive, so I played it repeatedly, thinking, "I'll do it this time."

Reaching the end with one last jump to make, I'd fall into the water. "Just one more try!" I'd say, the determination evident in my face, brows scrunched up, and hands gripping the control tightly. Cross the street, barely missing the truck? Check. Hop on the first log and quickly jump to the lily pad? Check. Watch in rage as it sinks under me before I can make the next move? Check. And yet, I kept playing.

I don't remember if I ever got past the first screen, but I tried again recently to see if my jumping talent improved. After finding the in-browser emulator, I worked my way through the first level, confirming my belief that it would be as frustrating as I remember. Crossing the street was the easy part, but those floating logs were the real enemy. I would also get ahead of myself, brazenly hopping when I knew my chances of success were slim. Through willpower, I made it to the second screen; it was the same environment, but with alligators and faster cars. I quit after my third try, accepting that *Frogger* is not in my gamer skillset. –Erin Hawley

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Full Throttle:
All-American Racing

PUBLISHER: Cybersoft.
DEVELOPER: Gremlin Interactive.
GAME TYPE: Motorcycle Racing/Jet Ski Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Consisting of motorcycle and jet ski racing (Combination mode features both while Solo mode has one or the other), *Full Throttle: All-American Racing* lets you select from such fictional racers as ex-con Crush, brash New Yorker Grogan, last year's champion Eagle, former wresting champion Steel (a pretty female), and rookie Hammer (a long-haired African-American). The action, which culminates in the Race America Cup, takes place across the U.S., with gamers racing across such areas as the "winding Appalachian Mountains, the ups and downs of San Francisco's streets, and the flat wastelands of the Arizona desert." There are more than ten locations in all.

Along with score bonuses and repair icons, you can find money while you race that can be used to upgrade your bike's tires, engine, and body. You can also purchase nitros and new bikes. Your bike can only take a certain amount of damage, and you can kick your nearby opponents, a feature similar to *Road Rash*. With its sprite scaling and low, behind-the-vehicle perspective, *Full Throttle* also evokes such games as *Hang-On* and *OutRun*. Enhanced with Mode 7 graphics and using split-screen during two-player mode, the game is known in Japan as *Full Power*.

Notable Quotable:

"*Full Throttle*'s racing aspect seems extremely artificial . . . despite being spread across the United States, the courses don't offer much variety . . . Kicking would be a good idea if the collision detection weren't so awful . . . The jet ski stages are even worse than the motorcycles. There's no sense of speed so it feels like you're just slogging through marshlands. You can collect power-ups, but they're so ineffective you can't even tell when a turbo kicks in. The music is pretty good, but there's only one song." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

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Fun 'n Games

PUBLISHER: Tradewest.
DEVELOPER: Leland Interactive Media.
GAME TYPE: Educational/Art/Music/Maze/First-Person Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

This multi-activity cartridge lets you compose original songs, rearrange existing songs, create works of art (using paint, patterns, special effects, stamps, and more), mix and match and dress up characters, and play two simple arcade-style games. In Mouse Maze, players guide a mouse as it collects cheese while avoiding cats. Similar to (but much simpler than) *Mouse Trap* (1981, arcade), you can collect bones to turn into a dog that can chase the cats. Space Lazer is a first-person shooter viewed from the cockpit of a spaceship, with the player aiming and firing lasers at enemy ships, which you can locate via onscreen radar. After destroying all the ships, you'll face a boss. As with *Mario Paint*, *Fun 'n Games* is compatible with the Super NES Mouse.

In addition to the various art, music, and dress-up activities, the Genesis version of *Fun 'n Games* includes a third arcade-style game, Whack a Clown, which is similar to *Whac-A–Mole*. The 3DO rendition contains five games: Space Cadet (third-person spaceship shooter), Whereabouts (memory match), Max & Maxine (maze), Aquashark (side-scrolling shooter), and Sliding Puzzle. From a collecting standpoint, the SNES game is by far the hardest to find as only 2,000 were produced.

Notable Quotable:
"*Fun 'n Games* fills the time pleasantly and non-violently, but even children will admit the fun is measured in modest amounts." – *GamePro* (July,1994)

Schiffer Publishing

F-Zero

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo.
GAME TYPE: Futuristic Racing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

The year is 2560. Multi-billionaires who earned their fortune through intergalactic trade crave entertainment, and that's exactly what they got with *F-Zero*, a "competition like the F-1 races held on Earth centuries ago."

A faithful port of Nintendo's 1990 arcade game, *F-Zero* for the SNES features blazing speeds (with a soundtrack to match), smooth scaling with Mode 7 graphics, and a variety of track components and hazards, such as landmines, jump plates, left-pull and right-pull magnets, dash zones, and roughs, the last of which slow down your hover car and interfere with its handling. From time to time you will need to pull over and make a pit run to restore your car's power.

The game features fifteen courses (located on nine planets), including Mute City, Big Blue, Sand Ocean, Death Wind, Silence, White Land, and Port Town. You can do a Practice race or play Gran Prix mode, where the goal is to finish among the top three drivers for all five courses in each league circuit. There are three leagues (Knight, Queen, King) and three difficulty levels (beginner, standard, expert), and you can select from four different vehicles, each ranked according to horsepower, maximum speed, and weight. Captain Falcon drives The Blue Falcon while Dr. Stuart helms the Golden Fox. Pico pilots the Wild Goose while Samurai Goroh takes the wheel of the Fire Stingray.

Fun, futuristic, and fast (the action moves quickly, even when you haven't pressed the super jet turbo button), *F-Zero* inspired a number of subsequent arcade-style racers, including *Wipeout 64* (Nintendo 64) and *F-Zero GX* (GameCube).

Notable Quotable:

"This hovercraft racing game plays like an exhilarating cross between the Indy 500 and the Star Gate sequence in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It has everything aficionados could want: twisty, neon-lit tracks, you-are-there sound effects, and streamlined, brightly colored speed machines in place of boring old cars. Well, almost everything. The vertigo-inducing graphics and feather-touch play control apparently didn't leave enough memory to allow two-player, head-to-head competition." –*Entertainment Weekly* (September 27, 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"*F-Zero* was an impressive feat back when it launched alongside the SNES in 1991. The fast-paced racer looked and played like no other racing game that came before it. What made *F-Zero* such a great showcase of the SNES' horsepower was the sense of speed the game conveyed. Tracks and vehicles zipped across the screen, and the futuristic sci-fi aesthetic of the ships and environments popped thanks to the system's powerful, newly-minted hardware. *F-Zero*'s cast of racers and their iconic sci-fi vehicles further set the game apart from other racing games on the system, and endeared themselves in the hearts of fans." –Digital Trends (www.digitaltrends.com), which ranked *F-Zero* the 21st best SNES game.

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Insider Insight:
The first game I ever played on the Super Nintendo was *Super Mario World*, but the game I was most interested in checking out was actually *F-Zero*. Coming from a racing family, I've always been partial to driving games, and the Genesis had already proven that the 16-bit consoles were going to take the genre to the next level.

We'd all been hearing about the mighty Mode 7 for the better part of a year by the time the SNES was released, so I couldn't wait to get my hands on what promised to be the next evolution of racing games. *F-Zero* didn't disappoint. The insane sense of speed right from the opening lap was mind boggling, and it only got more intense from there. The overwhelming feeling that you were flying through a real world rather than a strip of asphalt that stretched on into an impossible distance was a total shift in the way racing games felt for me from that point forward.

It was a nice bonus that the game played brilliantly on top of it all. Each track felt unique, with gaps, high winds, and massive jumps, all on tracks that seemed to hang miles above a bustling, futuristic metropolis. I was even impressed by the explosion and resulting strip of wreckage whenever my hovercraft took too much damage or careened off course. –Greg Sewart

Insider Insight:
I've never played sports competitively. Growing up, I went outside with other neighborhood kids, getting my wheelchair stuck in the dense foliage of our backyard while playing hide-and-seek until the street lights came on, but I was never on a school baseball or basketball team. I was all right with that, as suffering through my brother's games and practices were enough sporting for me. But there was one thing I excelled at and could contend in—racing video games.

The clearest and most nostalgic memories of my childhood took place in front of our friend's TV, sitting crossed-legged on their carpeted floor, playing *F-Zero*. My brother and our pals would race the tracks, trying to beat each other's high scores. I would repeatedly win, expertly dodging those bumpers and taking curves like a master pilot. Years of driving my motorized wheelchair gave me the skills to outplay everyone on those retro highways.

Maneuvering *F-Zero*'s hover cars felt natural and gave me the same thrills as driving my chair down a steep blacktop driveway. In *F-Zero*, when you pull to the side of the track to recharge, there's a risk of losing control of your vehicle or slowing down enough for other cars to pass. You'd either take that chance or pray you don't bang into another wall in the next lap. It was exhilarating to make such a decision in that instant, and it mimicked the choices I made when I went "off-roading" in my chair. Of course, I wasn't flying at *F-Zero* speed, but the danger was real. More than twenty years later, I've slowed down and put safety first, but my driving hand is still flying. –Erin Hawley

Schiffer Publishing, LTD.

Gemfire

PUBLISHER: Koei.
DEVELOPER: Koei.
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

In *Gemfire*, players must reunite seven different gems (each housing a wizard, a sorceress, or a dragon) with a magical crown and free Princess Robyn, who has been put in jail by the evil King Eselred. Using a combination of military and domestic tactics, players must unite all the provinces of the land. This entails consulting advisors for strategy, cultivating the land, protecting provinces, trading for food and gold, gaining the support of the people, hiring creatures to fight wars, investing in an army, and much more. Armies consist of five units: cavalry, two infantries, archers, and a special unit consisting of mercenaries, monsters, wizards and sorceresses. Battles, which are waged against such creatures as skeletons, gargoyles, lizards, and ogres, are viewed from an angled/overhead perspective, with players selecting from such options as wait, move, command unit, build fence, and retreat. Also released for the NES and Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

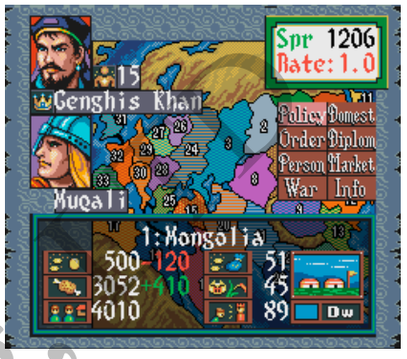
"Growing up in a small town, the game selection was scarce. We would get one game rental per month . . . often there was little to choose from. Sometimes I had to just pick something out, just to give it a shot. For $2.14 you could rent a video game for two days. So my friend, 'OCD Josh,' and I would walk to Main Street Convenience store, snatch up a game, some snacks, and some bad horror movies. We'd make a weekend of it, attempting to stay up as late as we could (it was the only time we had a shot at the big wood-panel TV in the living room).

"It was on one of these weekends that we discovered *Gemfire*, released by Koei in June of 1992, when I was the tender age of twelve . . . The game has a fairly simple premise; You choose a kingdom and attempt to take over the world. Each kingdom has access to a gem, which controls a Magician (or Dragon), and when you overtake another kingdom, you get their gem. To win, you must take over all the lands and reunite the gems. This little game has a surprising level of depth. You have to grow crops, feed your people, protect against natural disasters, build an army, invade, and deal in diplomacy. Surprisingly complex for an SNES game. I rented *Gemfire* a great number of times. Luckily, it never seemed to be rented, as I assume the general population of my hick town lacked the mental capacity to play the game, evidenced by the fact that I could return the game with my save file on it, rent it again a month later, and it would have the same save files on it. So, good for me!" –Eddie (www.bloodybits.com)

Schiffer Publishing Ltd.

Genghis Khan II:
Clan of the Gray Wolf

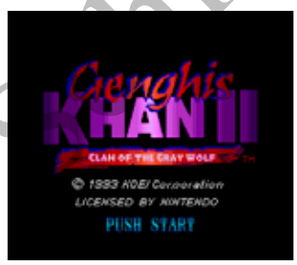
PUBLISHER: Koei.
DEVELOPER: Koei.
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy, 1–4 (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.



The sequel to *Genghis Khan* for the NES and home computers, *Genghis Khan II: Clan of the Gray Wolf* lets you conquer Mongolia as historical despot Genghis Khan. Or, you can play as one of twelve leaders (such as King John or Philip II) on a conquest to take over the entire known world. To achieve success, you must employ turn-based actions to develop a military (including the promoting and demoting of generals), raise a family, select your successor, choose who will marry your daughter, buy and sell goods, control the population, keep the economy stable, and much more, though the harem option was excluded from the U.S. version of the game. There are sixteen historical military units to command, including knights, samurai, and elephants. Sandstorms, epidemics, typhoons, and other random events complicate matters. For advice, players can call on such legendary figures as Thomas Aquinas, Marco Polo, and Robin Hood. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"*Genghis Khan II: Clan of the Gray Wolf* has a lot in common with the other Koei releases . . . It's a detailed, deep and intimidatingly complex strategy design built to simulate a real period in the history of the world . . . plays out in lots and lots of statistics-filled menus and map screens, only occasionally accented by more active sequences showcasing the actual clashes of swords, bows, and horses on the battlefield . . . Much of what was appealing about *Nobunaga's Ambition* is appealing here, too, and many of the same cautionary statements are worthwhile—this game is only for the seriously hardcore strategy genre fan . . . *Genghis Khan II* is a less desirable download than *Nobunaga* [because] the battles in *Khan II* play out on a battlefield that any other tactics-style video game would present with an overlaid grid . . . But here, there is no grid. Your horsemen, archers, sword-wielding infantry, and other units are only able to move a certain distance per turn, but without some kind of clear visual cue you're left to guess at just how far they'll be able to go—often, you'll get the placement of your men wrong by just a bit, or your horse will be just a bit too close to the guy behind him . . . or you won't quite be able to get into range with your archer . . . It can be frustrating." –Lucas M. Thomas (www.ign.com), reviewing the SNES game downloaded to the Wii's Virtual Console.



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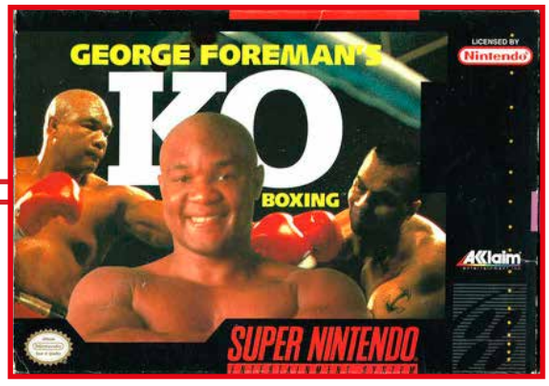
George Foreman's KO Boxing

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Boxing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

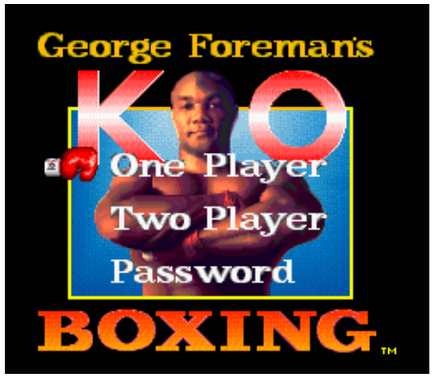


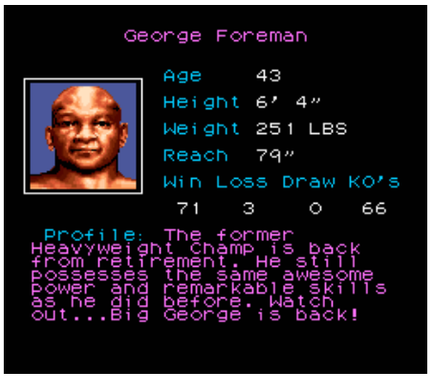
Like its Genesis counterpart, *George Foreman's KO Boxing* for the SNES lets players step into the ring as the famous former Heavyweight Champion, who must face fifteen fictional opponents (compared to twelve in the downgraded NES version), each with his own fighting style. The *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*-like viewpoint is from behind Foreman, who can block, dodge left and right (there is no movement around the ring), throw left and right crosses and jabs, and execute "superpunches," which are earned by delivering successful combinations.

Instead of standard damage meters (like in the NES rendition), a pair of portraits in the lower corners of the screen begin showing blood, bruises, and swelling as the fighters take hits. Knocking your opponent down four times in a three-round match results in a knockout. You score a technical knockout if you knock down your opponent three times in a single round. If neither of these occurs by the end of the third round, the judge decides the winner based on each boxer's knockdowns, punches landed, and total damage done. Also released for the Game Boy. The Game Gear and Master System versions, the latter of which wasn't released in the U.S., are much different as they are patterned after the Master System version of *James Buster Douglas Knockout Boxing*.

Fun Fact:
George Foreman was married five times. All five of his sons are named George Edward. Two of his five daughters are also called George. He is considered the greatest knockout boxer of all time, with sixty-eight of his seventy-six wins coming by KO.

Notable Quotable:
"If you like boxing then be advised—this game's nothing like boxing . . . only the digitized speech and photos of the fighters save this from a catastrophe . . . you can't move around the ring . . . there is a lack of variation in punches, and the character sprites look bad . . . difficulty setting's ridiculously hard, and controls are limited." *–N-Force* (November 1992)





Scanner Publishing

Ghoul Patrol

PUBLISHER: LucasArts/JVC.
DEVELOPER: LucasArts/Motion Pixel.
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Action, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

An indirect sequel to the SNES and Genesis favorite, *Zombies Ate My Neighbors*, *Ghoul Patrol* has similar gameplay, but lacks the cult following of its progenitor. Once again, players control either Zeke or Julie (cooperatively) as they shoot creatures and locate and rescue victims in an area before they are attacked by monsters. Once you've found all the victims (the map is gone, replaced by text prompts), a Time Portal will advance you to the next area. The default weapon is a crossbow, which has unlimited firepower (in *ZAMN*, the default weapon was a squirt gun that could run out of ammo), but players can also find a machine gun, a homing plasma gun, a laser gun, and a lobbing smash gun. In addition to running and shooting, Zeke and Julie can now jump (over lava pits, spikes, and the like) and slide.

Levels to traverse include: Metropolis, which is filled with floating eyes, possessed library books, teenager-eating plants, green goblins, and garbage can ghosts; Ming Dynasty, which is haunted by samurai spirits with flaming swords, levitating monks, and fire-belching winged demons; Caribbean, where you'll battle pirate zombies in a graveyard and swashbucklers in town; Medieval World, which contains a castle and a dungeon teaming with such frights as floating skulls and spectral knights; and Ghosts and Demon World, where you might want to take the red potion to transform into the Grim Reaper in order to survive. *Ghoul Patrol*, in which LucasArts handed the brunt of the developmental duties to a Malaysian studio called Motion Pixel, has more visual detail and polish than *Zombies Ate My Neighbors*, but it's shorter and not quite as much fun.

Insider Insight:
The most significant experience I've had with *Ghoul Patrol*, other than getting it out of my dad's frozen car at 7:00 a.m. on my twelfth birthday, just after I learned they closed school for snow, came many years later—I learned that I'm pretty much the only person who loves it. I'd like to admonish the rest of you gamers in the most efficient way I can: FOR SHAME! This game does nothing wrong! It's only more of a console action game, as opposed to *Zombies Ate My Neighbors*, which is more of an arcade-type game. Yes, it's shorter, but not by that much. Yes, there are fewer weapons, but *ZAMN* had more than it needed to begin with. The graphics are different but still excellent. The music is different but still excellent. It makes good on offering a different experience than *ZAMN*, which is better than a superior experience because it doesn't diminish your appreciation of its predecessor. Go give *Ghoul Patrol* the love it deserves. Now! –Jeff Lawhead

Notable Quotable:
"I never really understood that project. No one approached Dean [Sharpe] or I about doing a *ZAMN* sequel, and when we first saw the game, it was a unique product, not related to *ZAMN* at all. Dean and I were heads down working on *Metal Warriors*, then one day we find out that Zeke and Julie are in that game, and it's suddenly changed into a *ZAMN* sequel. So I've always been somewhat confused about that game. I always felt someone in management changed it into a *ZAMN* sequel in the hope it would sell better." –Mike Ebert, designer of *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

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Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Goal!

PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: Tose.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

Released the same year as *Goal! Two* for the NES, *Goal!* lets players select from twenty-four international teams for an Exhibition match or Super Cup play. You can challenge the computer or a friend, or you and a friend can team up against the computer. The game dispenses with the angled/overhead view of the NES version of *Goal!*, and the isometric perspective of *Goal! Two*, in favor of a more traditional side/overhead view, plus it has a small radar showing the location of all the players on the field.

Each of the eleven players on your team is rated in seven different skill categories. There are four selectable formations (4-3-3, 4-4-2, Sweeper, 3-5-2), and tournaments can be saved via battery backup. As in *Goal! Two*, which the game shares a lot in common with, auto-goalie, fouls, and offsides can be turned on or off. You can also turn off the radar, select whether or not to make goal kicks automatic, and set the amount of time per half from one minute all the way up to forty-five minutes. Known as *Super Goal!* in Europe and *Super Cup Soccer* in Japan. Followed by *Super Goal! 2*.

Memories:

Though I never really got into soccer video games (I thought *Pelé's Soccer* for the Atari 2600 was dreadful), I was obsessed with the real sport when I was a kid. I loved playing soccer during recess at school, and in the summer I would even sit outside under the tree, listening to Dallas Tornado soccer games on my little round green Panasonic Panapet AM transistor radio. This was the same radio I used to listen to *The General Mills Radio Adventure Theater* (hosted by Tom Bosley), which debuted in 1977, the same year the Atari 2600 came out. Damn, I'm old.

Notable Quotable:

"Most of the players look the same, with one or two having slightly different features (i.e. skin tone, hair color, etc.). The gameplay itself is a little choppy at times, and the way players fall down after being tackled too hard looks a little unrealistic. For a 16-bit game, it doesn't make good usage of the system's capabilities . . . repetitive music constantly plays throughout the match (thankfully it can be turned off) . . . While it's not as good as I hoped it would be, it's still a pretty decent soccer game . . . If you're a diehard soccer fan who has to have every soccer game, or just enjoys a good game of soccer once in a while, then this *Goal!* might score with you."
–Larcen Tyler (www.gamefaqs.com)

Schiffer Publishing, LTD.

GODS

PUBLISHER: Mindscape.
DEVELOPER: The Bitmap Brothers.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

On a quest for immortality in ancient Greece, you, as Hercules, must slay the four guardians of the city and return to Mount Olympus. The fabled hero walks, climbs, jumps, ducks, uses keys to open doors and treasure chests, explores hidden rooms, operates levers to solve puzzles, collects tokens to uncover clues, and avoids such traps and obstacles as spikes and enemy projectiles. To help you on your quest, you can pick up or purchase (with collected gems) such items as a dagger, shurikens, fireballs, spears, shields, teleporters, food and hearts (for restoring health), and more, including potions that can freeze monsters and increase your weapon power. Some of these items you'll carry in your inventory, which has four slots.

Hercules walks and fires shots quickly, and there are plenty of spread-fire weapons, but the creatures he battles are intelligent, meaning they can steal his items, avoid his shots, and follow him. If you play poorly, fewer enemies will appear, which is an unusual handicapping system. Multi-stage levels to journey through include The City, The Temple, The Labyrinth, and The Underworld, each labyrinthine in nature. Based on the 1991 computer game, which was slower than the SNES and Genesis carts. In addition to speeding things up, the console versions also added background music during gameplay.

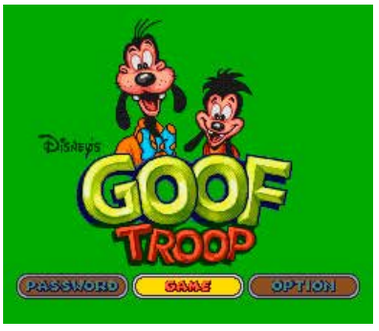
Notable Quotable:
"*GODS* has graphics and sound effects that are skillfully done. The characters and enemies are well-animated, and the music is okay, but the challenge and number of levels, combined with great strategy and side-scrolling action, make *GODS* a knockout." –*GameFan Magazine* (April 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"Graphically, this game has the detail of the best computer titles, but it plays like an NES cart! I love the intricacies and the variety in the game, like the switch-pulling, etc. Unfortunately, the control is extremely awkward . . . With better interaction, *GODS* would be an awesome game." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1993)

Scanfer Publishing

Goof Troop

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 or 2 Players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.



Although it looks sort of like *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, *Goof Troop* is neither as deep nor as enjoyable as the Nintendo masterpiece, but it is a quality game. Players control Disney's Goofy and his son Max as they explore a jungle island in order to find the pirate stronghold and rescue their kidnapped pals, PJ and Pete. To aid them in their puzzle-laden quest, Goofy and Max can find and use barrels to throw at pirates, boards to cross broken bridges, a rope gun to cross streams and bottomless pits, candles to light the way through dark passages, a shovel to uncover buried items, and keys to open doors (you must have the correct key). Ringing a bell brings pirates running, while collecting bananas and cherries adds hearts to your health meter. Diamonds will earn you extra continues. To open certain gates, Goofy and Max can kick blocks onto special markers and switches. To reset a puzzle, simply walk off the screen and back onto said screen.

Notable Quotable:

"*Goof Troop* is an absolute gem of a game when teaming up with a friend in multiplayer. It might be short, the gameplay may be simple, and the puzzles are easy, but there's no denying it's an incredibly enjoyable experience when both members of the Troop are on screen. However, the single player is the complete opposite, the simplistic nature of the game and its low difficulty level makes it tedious, and as time goes on you'll get fed up completing puzzles that were evidently designed for more than one person. If you're considering playing *Goof Troop*, it's essential you have a friend to play it with, as without them you're not even getting half of the intended experience." –Andy Green (www.nintendolife.com)

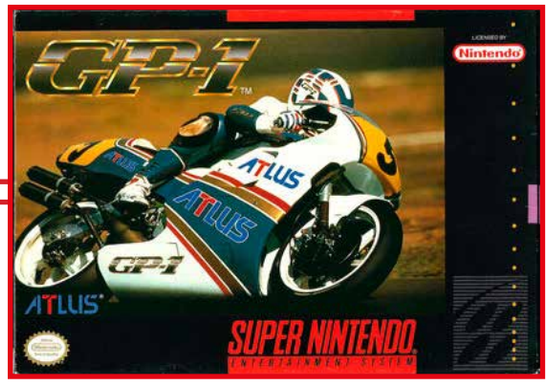
Insider Insight:

When I was growing up, my dad was my only video game partner. But that was okay, because he and I would play everything together—as long as the game wasn't too complicated (meaning there weren't more than, like, four buttons to press.) Unlike *Super Mario World* and *Donkey Kong Country*, *Goof Troop* allowed my dad and I to play at the same time—which was VERY cool—and the game forced us to put our brains together to solve puzzles, defeat bosses, and manage our inventory. I can't tell you how many times we laughed so hard that we cried while playing *Goof Troop*, or how many minutes we spent stuck on puzzles. But I can tell you that it left such a lasting impression that even today my dad and I fire up *Goof Troop* for old time's sake. –Brittney Brombacher

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd

GP-1

PUBLISHER: Atlus.
DEVELOPER: Genki.
GAME TYPE: Motorcycle Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.



Influenced by Sega's *Hang-On* (arcade, 1985), *GP-1* is a behind-the-bike-perspective motorcycle game that lets you race against fifteen opponents on thirteen twisting, turning tracks (based on the MotoGP circuit) in twelve countries. Each track is distinguished by nice background graphics, such as the mountains, towers, and Ferris wheel of the Japanese GP. By winning races, you can increase your world ranking and earn money to "build the ultimate super bike" by upgrading your ride's engine, frame, and front and rear suspension.

The top two-thirds of the screen shows gameplay and tachometer while the bottom third displays MPH, gear, a map of the track, time, lap, and place. A red arrow appears at the top of the screen, pointing the way just prior to turns. There are six different bikes to select from (MSR 500, RSV 500, RVG 500, AGW 500, ZTR 500, and CIGAVI), and you can even choose your own mechanic. Modes of play include GP Race (season), 1P vs 2P (split-screen), and Free Practice. *GP-1* lacks the brawling of a game like *Road Rash* (Genesis, 1991), but the tracks are enhanced by Mode 7 graphics.

Notable Quotable:
"Overall, *GP-1* provides an exciting ride. Anyone tired of F-1s should take this machine for a spin." –*GamePro* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"On the racetrack, each vehicle feels virtually the same; or at least, whatever differences they have are nullified because all that matters is if they can navigate every winding turn that appears on screen. Even with a map and a series of arrows acting as heads-up indicators, the turns come quick and sharply, and if the player isn't an expert at leaning, he'll run off of the pavement or crash from wobbling too much . . . While egregious enough that the courses are full of nearly non-navigable turns and clotted with rivals hardwired to ruin your progress, it heaps a crushing amount of importance on winning each race . . . Aside from its awful A.I. and controls, *GP-1* still tries to reach for a rounded realism." –Bill Hensel, a.k.a. John Legendoffzelda (playingwithsuperpower.com)

Source Publishing LLC

GP-1 Part II

PUBLISHER: Atlus.
DEVELOPER: Genki.
GAME TYPE: Motorcycle Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

The sequel to *GP-1*, *GP-1 Part II* has similar gameplay but offers four more tracks for a total of seventeen (across fourteen different countries). Modes of play include GP Race, VS Battle (split-screen against another player), and the new Time Attack, which is a race against the clock on any of the seventeen courses. Unlike the original game, the playfield takes up the entire screen (as opposed to the top two-thirds), with the map and various readouts overlayed on said screen. Once again, there are six bikes from which to choose, and you can upgrade your ride with better parts by winning races. Like its predecessor, *GP-1 Part II* is based on the MotoGP circuit and uses Mode 7 in depicting the action from a low, behind-your-bike perspective.

Notable Quotable:

"Atlus brings *GP-1* back to the SNES track. Despite improvements, *Part II* has lost some of the features that strengthened the original game." –*GamePro* (March 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"The only problem with the GP Race mode is a HUGE 34-character password you get at the end of each race. Even without a battery, though, *GP-1 Part II* is an excellent sequel and a must for SNES racing fans." –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (January 1995)

Schiffer Publishing Ltd.

Gradius III

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1991.

In *Gradius III*, an easier (thankfully), but extremely accurate port of Konami's 1989 arcade game, players pilot the Modulated Artillery Exalter (M.A.X.), a successor to the Warp Rattler from previous games in the series. You begin the auto-scrolling (to the right) action equipped with a standard Xtron Cannon, but you can add weapons by capturing red power pods that enemies leave behind when destroyed (blue pods act as smart bombs). Each red pod you capture boosts the gauge at the bottom of the screen by one weapon. To activate the currently engaged weapon, press the power-up button. Early in the cycle, you should increase your speed at least once before powering up with such weapons as secondary-fire missiles and two-way shots.

You'll battle your way through ten levels of swarming enemies, environmental hazards, and huge bosses. Levels include: The Dunes of Doom (a desert), The Carbonation Zone (filled with toxic bubbles), Lava Them and Leave Them Zone (a "molten nightmare"), Pop Rock Monolith Zone (beware the death ring missile launchers), Light My Fire Zone (fly through lashing flame tunnels and massive scorpions), Bacterion's Garden (filled with plant-based enemies), The Greased Lightning Round (a labyrinth of electronic circuitry), Mayors on Parade (featuring a "grotesque gallery of gargantuan Grand Marshalls"), The Gauntlet (blast through a maze of machinery), and Bacterion's Lair (a faceoff against your ultimate nemesis).

Prior to beginning the game, you can customize your selection of power-ups from a variety of choices (missiles, for example, can skim across the ground, fire up and down, shoot down and backward simultaneously, or emit a small spread), giving a healthy dose of depth to the game. There are options for weapons that orbit your ship as well. Slowdown rears its head when the action gets hot and heavy, but this is still a fun game. The original *Gradius* had an excellent port on the NES. Followed by such games as *Gradius III and IV* (two titles on one disc) and *Gradius V* for the PS2.

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Insider Insight:
Gradius is my favorite shooter series, and my love of *Gradius III* is a matter of public record. People have asked me why, and argued that there are so many better SNES games to choose from. You may even be raising a skeptical eyebrow at my claim yourself. It's simple, really: *Gradius III* was the game that made me the Gradius fan I am today. Other games in the series have been released since, and while some of them are better looking and more customizable than *Gradius III*, none of them had quite the same impact on me.

I'd played and enjoyed some of the earlier games (*Gradius* and *Life Force*, both on the NES), but in the fall of 1991, *Gradius III* showed me how big of a leap 8-bit to 16-bit could be, and it showed me what a great game could be like without 8-bit technology limitations. Everything about it—the music, the graphics, the near-perfect control, and the massive amount of weaponry you could choose from—all of this hooked me in a way that none of the previous games did.

Then there are the memories:

My best friend Chris and I spending many nights at his house playing the game into the wee hours of the morning; my multiple run-throughs at home, my sound system cranked so loudly that every boss explosion would rattle the windows; and the times I experimented with matching up my favorite music with the game to make my own videos. I played so often, I mastered the hidden arcade difficulty level, and I even bought the original Super Famicom version because I enjoyed it so much.

Sure, maybe there are better SNES games out there, but *Gradius III* has been my favorite for nearly thirty years, and that's never going to change. –Rob Strangman

Insider Insight:
I've always been fascinated with Easter Island heads, but I had no idea this game had them. When I got to this level for the first time, I was blown away. I love the way some of the heads rotate around to face your ship as they shoot at you. The totem pole of Easter Island Heads just before the boss level is just awesome! This level really made me want to study the history of the island further.

Another great memory with *Gradius III* was having four option ships helping me, each firing out the ripple laser weapon upon entering the Bubbles level. It had a fun and smooth flow to it as I popped giant bubbles into little ones. Popping the Bubble Brain Boss was always satisfying. I never knew the formal names of the bosses in the game, so I had fun making up some of my own: Beetle Boss, Bubble Brain Boss, Space Ship Boss, Twin Easter Island Heads Boss, Fire Dragon Snake Boss, and Man-Eating Plant Boss.

I've always liked the cool power-up "coin/money" economy mechanism; if you were patient with each "coin" you collected, you'd be able to spend your savings in more powerful ways, such as adding four option units to your ship. The thing I remember most is having three or four lives stocked up and a fully powered ship, with all of the little option fighters that took forever to build up helping me out, and then losing everything upon hitting or getting hit by something! It would crack me up how I'd just sit there in total shock after dying while trying to defeat the Man-Eating Plant Boss and being left with a big decision: do I restart the whole game from the beginning and start collecting a bunch of coins and powering up my ship again, or deal with continuing at that same difficult level/spot I died in using a new ship with no firepower to speak of? This conundrum was just one of the trademarks of *Gradius III*, which I'll always come back to play. –Steve Woita

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

The Great Circus Mystery Starring Mickey & Minnie

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

The sequel to *The Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse*, *The Great Circus Mystery* stars Mickey and Minnie Mouse as they cooperate (in two-player mode) to work their way through six cute levels: the Haunted Circus, the Jungle, the Haunted House, the Caves, the Frozen Plains, and the Baron's Castle, each of which has thematic music to match. In addition to the two-player co-op mode, what sets the game apart are different costumes Minnie and Mickey can wear that give them different abilities, including a sweeper outfit (suck in enemies and coins), a safari getup (climb walls, swing from hooks), and cowboy clothes (bounce on a wooden horse, fire corks out of a pop gun).

The levels are short and fairly easy (including the bosses), but they are diverse and entertaining as players jump on enemies, scale trees, leap across hazards, hop on skeletons and other interesting platforms, collect coins hidden in blocks, purchase extra lives and outfit upgrades in Clarabelle Cow's shop, and much more. While not quite on the level with *Castle of Illusion* or *Mickey Mania*, *The Great Circus Mystery* is nevertheless a fine (not to mention fun) game. The SNES game has a richer color palette than the Genesis version. Released for the Game Boy Advance as *Disney's Magical Quest 2 Starring Mickey & Minnie*. Followed by *Disney's Magical Quest 3 Starring Mickey & Donald* (GBA).

Notable Quotable:

"At heart, *The Great Circus Mystery* is a standard platformer . . . Players can tackle the adventure solo, in which case they are forced to choose between one of the characters, or alongside a friend, which is by far the best way to experience the game . . . undeniably looks great and is well-animated . . . occasionally comes across as mundane and uninspired, alternating solid platforming challenges with segments that feel like they were put together without much thought . . . soundtrack is filled with great tunes, even if most of them are brief [and] loop a little bit too frequently . . . boss encounters are creative . . . level of difficulty is good, although its continue system, which takes players back to the mid-level checkpoint once all lives are lost instead of making them return to the stage's start, comes off as not adequately punishing." –Nintendobound (nintendobound.wordpress.com)

Stuffed Publishing

The Great Waldo Search

PUBLISHER: THQ.
DEVELOPER: Radiance Software.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle/Educational/General, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

In *The Great Waldo Search*, players help the wizard White Beard by guiding a magnifying glass around the screen, searching for a magic scroll in each of five horizontally scrolling worlds: Land of the Gargantuas, Kingdom of the Carpet Fliers, Water Monks vs. Fire Druids, Enchanted Underground, and Land of the Waldos. Other items to search for include point markers, clocks (for extra time), special clocks (for freezing the standard action and giving players bonus items to look for), and, of course, Waldo himself, who appears in a different place each time the game is played. Finding Waldo's dog Woof unleashes a bonus round in which players guide the magic carpet-riding pup over a side-scrolling cityscape, grabbing bones for extra points. Based on the Where's Waldo series of search-and-find picture books created by English illustrator Martin Handford. Also released for the NES and Genesis.

Fun Fact:
In the U.K., where the Where's Waldo series was created, Waldo is called Wally. The first Where's Wally? book was published by Little, Brown and Company on September 21, 1987.

Notable Quotable:
"It's much easier to find Waldo here than it is in the NES game because the graphics are that much richer, and there's no muddy palette. . . Your magnifying glass cursor thing moves much slower and is thus much more manageable than the cursor of the NES game . . . Waldo sticks out like a sore thumb, which I find odd . . . the scrolls are a little tougher to come by because they are much smaller and they have a tendency to blend in, especially on the expert skill setting." –DTM Rambles (YouTube)

Schiffer Publishing LTD

GunForce: *Battle Fire Engulfed Terror Island*

PUBLISHER: Irem.
DEVELOPER: Bits Studios.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

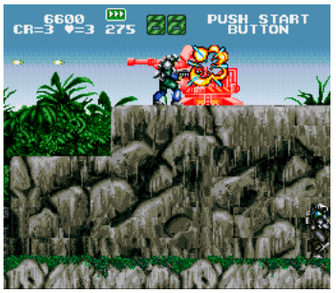
A port of Irem's 1991 arcade game, sans two-player simultaneous mode, *GunForce* is similar to *Contra*, but, as you might expect, not as good (few games are). Players, as an unnamed super soldier decked out in armor and a helmet, must run, jump, duck (under enemy fire), and shoot through five levels of play, keeping Earth safe from unnamed hostile forces. Players also climb ladders and ride vehicles on zip lines. There are other vehicles to briefly (and slowly) ride on (as opposed to drive) as well, including a jeep and a helicopter, and you can get in a machine similar to the ED-209 from *RoboCop*. As with *Contra*, players can fire in eight directions, and there are enemy soldiers, aliens, and gun turrets to destroy.

The game begins with the player being parachuted onto an island, and the proceeding action is straightforward as players go on a linear journey through a typical-looking jungle and the following typical-looking enemy locations: Front Base, Supply Depot, Communication Tower, Fortress, and Underground Base. The firepower and explosions sound fitting, but the music is scattershot, tuneless, and seems out of place. *GunForce* is easier than *Contra III: The Alien Wars* (and the original *Contra* for that matter) because the enemies are less relentless and don't fire at you as often. The sequel, *Gun Force II* (1994), was only released in the arcades.

Memories:
I'm a big fan of platform shooters like *GunForce*, especially the Contra series, *Gunstar Heroes* (Genesis), and *Sunset Riders* (arcade, Genesis, SNES). I enjoy some less obvious choices as well, such as *Midnight Resistance* (arcade, Genesis), *Demolition Man* (SNES), and *Phoenix 3* (3DO). There's just something satisfying about doing flips off platforms and running around shooting bad guys and scary creatures. In real life, I haven't touched a gun since I was a kid and have no desire to—go figure!

Notable Quotable:
"*GunForce* is fairly easy, especially for a game that feels so much like it's trying to be *Contra*.

Most of the enemies are little more than lemmings whose sole goal in this life is to die by your hands . . . hit detection is a little wonky . . . vehicles are powerful and can take many more hits than your character can, and they have infinite ammo for whatever weapon is equipped . . . no vehicle comes close to the chopper for sheer goofiness, as it takes up half the screen and looks exactly the same in the air as it did on the ground . . . The bosses are disappointingly easy, and the first one feels so similar to the first boss in *Contra* that it felt like I already knew how to beat it . . . the weapons sound as if they have a good kick to them . . . the scream your character makes when he dies is hilarious, and I often found myself chuckling as he slumped to the ground." –Retro Treasures (retrotreasures.blogspot.com)



Archive Publishing

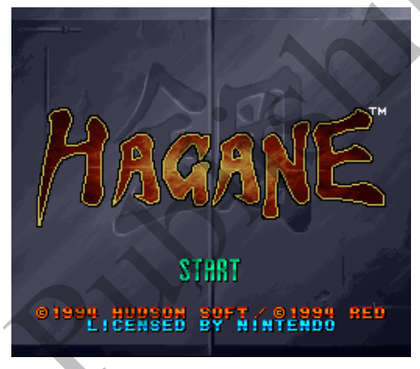
Hagane: *The Final Conflict*

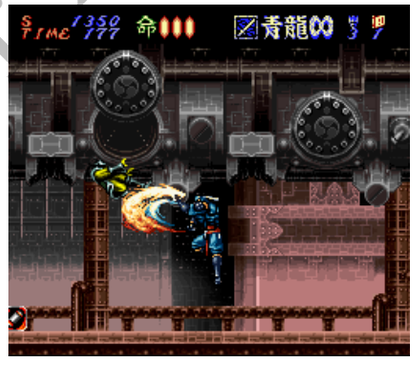
PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft/Red.
DEVELOPER: CAProduction.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

As ninja cyborg Hagane, you have sworn revenge against the Koma clan, which plans to destroy the world. Your mission takes you through five multi-stage levels: The Path to Disaster, The Fortress of Doom, Violated Heavens, Cry of the Spirits, and Into the Darkness. Victory will be a formidable task, but you are equipped with many moves and weapons, including double jumps, wall jumps, somersaults, backflips, dragon punches and flying kicks (both of which can be charged up), kunai (throwing daggers), grenades, a grappling hook, and a special weapon that damages all onscreen enemies and makes you temporarily invincible. Hagane, who wields a sword as his primary weapon, can also duck and slide.

The action is fast and intense as you dodge lasers, destroy turrets, do plenty of platforming, and battle an assortment of exotic enemies, including ninja soldiers and all manner of bouncing, flying, shooting, and sword-swinging creatures. There are bosses and mini-bosses to battle as well. If you enjoy the Ninja Gaiden series and/or *Shinobi III*, you should pick up a copy of *Hagane: The Final Conflict*. If, that is, you can find it and afford it (emulation is a good option).

Fun Fact:
Some sources say *Hagane* was a Blockbuster rental exclusive, but there are reports that it was also available at Electronics Boutique. Either way, it saw limited distribution and goes for big bucks these days.





Insider Insight:
"I know it when I see it." That's what instantly springs to mind when it comes to the aesthetic qualities of certain game libraries. For instance, Dreamcast's polygonal output almost always seemed to have a "plasticy" sheen, while too many PlayStation 2 games suffered from jagged polygonal models and backgrounds. When it comes to the Super Nintendo, many of the best (and worst) games unmistakably belong to the system. Bright, colorful graphics, Mode 7 scaling, and that odd echo of the slightly overrated sound chip developed by Ken Kutaragi, a.k.a., The Father of the PlayStation, gave SNES games a certain look and sound. But there are exceptions.

Hagane:The Final Conflict is one of those exceptions. I unwittingly overlooked this flawed but fun gem during the transition to the so-called "next-gen systems" such as Saturn and PlayStation. Luckily, I discovered the game a few years ago while attempting to play every SNES game ever officially released. It's fun, and it's distinctive, but what shocked me is how deliberately anti-SNES it seems to be. In other words, *Hagane* is almost a Genesis game masquerading in a SNES cartridge. It plays like *Shinobi*, and its dark and almost "dirty" graphics resemble a Genesis game, but it still sounds like a SNES game—just barely.

From all that I've seen, *Hagane* never got the audience and respect it deserved. Maybe it's due to the generational transition, maybe it's due to its good-but-not-great gameplay, or maybe it needed a change in venue. We'll never know for sure, but I do know that *Hagane* has charm and is worth your time. Like I said, I know a good game when I see it. –Rob Faraldi

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

HAL's Hole in One Golf

PUBLISHER: HAL Laboratory.
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Golf, 1–4 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1991.

The first SNES golf game, *HAL's Hole in One Golf* sports a constant overhead perspective (shading gives depth perception), separating it from such contemporaries as *PGA Tour Golf*. The game offers three difficulty levels, password-backed replays, and five modes of play: Practice, Stroke, Match, VS Hal, and Tournament, the last of which is a competition against sixty other golfers. Gameplay is arcade-style in nature, though players can select clubs, choose body position, hook or slice the ball, and put underspin or topspin on the ball. A three-press, swing meter format initiates backswing and determines power and accuracy. Known in Japan as *Jumbo Ozaki no Hole In One*.

Notable Quotable:

"The First Super NES golf game is a real pro, the well-designed and executed *Hal's Hole in One Golf*. There's nothing new in this computer simulation, but you'll appreciate the polish applied to the game. This is professional video golf. The game makes good use of the facilities of the Super NES, including a stunning introduction to each hole in which the camera flies up and down the fairway from the tee to the hole." –*Ultimate Unauthorized Super Nintendo Game Strategies* (Bantam Books, 1991)

Insider Insight:

There's not much golf being played in Brooklyn, New York, but golf clubs are often seen late at night being wielded by groups of teenagers looking to mix it up. All jokes aside, *HAL's Hole in One Golf* was the last game I should have loved or even played as a kid, but it ended up as one I played more than the platformers most kids my age were into, such as *Super Mario World*.

Hole in One Golf was as vanilla a golf experience as you could get: no bells and whistles, just a good, simple game of golf. The corny music, views of each hole before you started them, and the hole-in-one animation were about its only audio/visual dressings. As a result, the game was easy for me to get into, and soon enough I was on a quest to get a hole-in-one on every hole or an eagle on the par fives. I spent an entire summer on that game and eventually knew the ins and outs of every hole. I often destroyed my dad in head-to-head competition, which made the game even more fun.

Above all else, *Hole in One Golf* did something special for me and my dad—it made us want to go out and learn to play real golf, which we did. When he got his first real-life hole-in-one in 1996, I couldn't help but make a reference to the game. While I haven't been to the course or driving range as much as I would like the past few years, I know I would have never gone in the first place without this game. –Patrick Hickey Jr.

Sheffer Publishing, LTD

HammerLock Wrestling

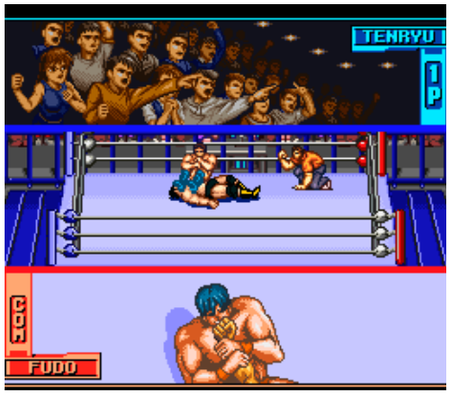
PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: Jaleco.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Wrestling, 1–8 players (4-player simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

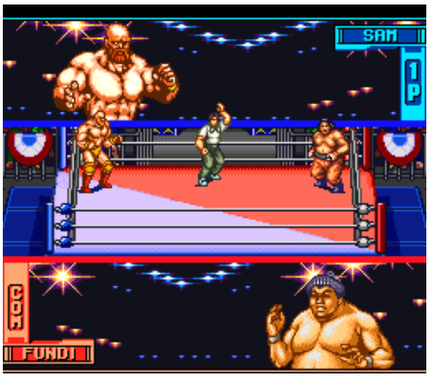
Released as *Tenryu Genichiro no Pro Wrestling Revolution* in Japan, *HammerLock Wrestling* lets players select from twelve fighters, including Japanese grappler Genichiro Tenryu and guys that appear to be modeled after Hulk Hogan (Dorgan), Road Warrior Hawk (Eagle), and Lex Luger (Ludger). The game features your typical variety of punches, kicks, stomps, and grapples, and players can run, exit the ring, do turnbuckle stomps, and pull off special moves (piledriver, suplex, axe bomber, flying lariat, headbutt, and the like), but the action has a striking visual element that sets it apart from the pack (but not in a good way).

In addition to the traditional non-scrolling side-view of the ring, which is positioned in the center of the screen, the top and bottom thirds of the screen show animated close-ups, which, while nice-looking, are distracting and make the fighting area too small. Modes of play include Exhibition Match, Champion League Match, Tournament Match, and Top Ranking Match, which is a one-on-one or two-on-two tag team challenge against all the other wrestlers to become World Champion.

Notable Quotable:
"If you're looking for a new wrestling cart, and you've already beaten *Slam Masters*, *Natsume Championship Wrestling* and all the old WWF games, then wait for the new *WWF Raw* from Acclaim or even *WCW* from FCI. *HammerLock* just sucks." –*Game Players* (August 1994)

Memories:
I prefer fighting titles such as *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter II* to wrestling games like *HammerLock*, and I have no desire to watch professional wresting on TV these days, but as a kid growing up in the 1970s, I got a kick out of such showmen of the ring as Andre the Giant, Hulk Hogan, and Kerry Von Erich. The Von Erichs lived fairly close to my house in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, and one time while some friends and I were hanging out at Grapevine Lake (which is between Dallas and Fort Worth), Kerry, clad in a Speedo and looking all long-haired and buff, drove his boat up to the shore, picked up a couple of hot girls, and sped off. I have no idea if it was a pre-planned pick-up, or if he just saw something he liked and went for it. Regardless, it was a cool (and impressive) thing to witness.

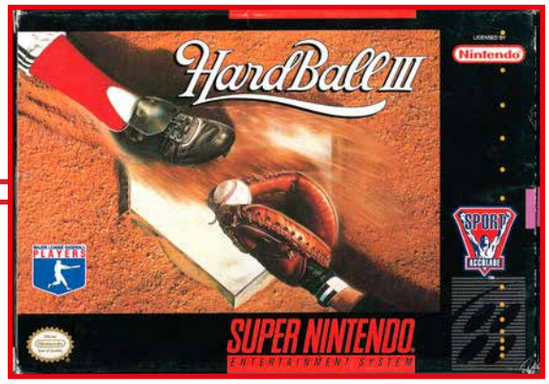




Scuffer Publishing, LLC

Hardball III

PUBLISHER: Accolade.
DEVELOPER: MindSpan.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

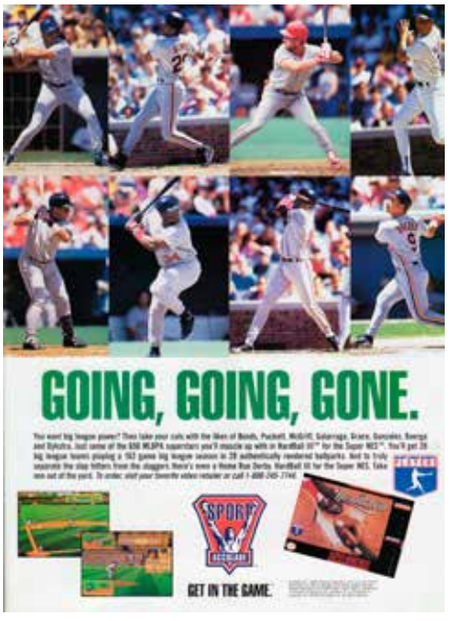


The follow-up to *Hardball!* for the Genesis (*Hardball II* was only released for computers), *Hardball III* is the Super NES version of *Al Michaels Announces Hardball III* for the Genesis, but without involvement by the Emmy award-winning sportscaster. As with previous games in the series, this one lacks MLB licensing. However, MLBPA licensing means there are more than 650 Major Leaguers, including such superstars as Barry Bonds and Kirby Puckett. Player and team editors let gamers customize player names, abilities, and pictures, along with team logos. There are twenty-six realistic ballparks, plus a Homerun Derby, a manage-only mode, and batting cage practice.

Types of swings include bunt, contact, power, and strategy, each selectable via a menu. A similar menu system lets pitchers select from four types of throws. Passwords save edited information, season progress, team and player stats, two created teams, and VCR-like instant replays. Viewpoints include behind the batter, behind the pitcher, or alternating, and players can employ such strategies as intentional walks, shifting the infield, and adjusting the outfield. Followed by *Hardball '94* (Genesis).

Notable Quotable:
"A great-playing baseball game in the Hardball tradition, featuring superb graphics, control, and a host of options. The addition of the MLBPA license is a big plus, but the elimination of the battery backup and play-by-play commentary found in the Genesis version is a major disappointment." *–Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (April 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Although *Hardball III* has a good combination of options, stats, atmosphere, and sounds, you can't help but feel disappointed by the graphics. The choppy players will frustrate you if you've played smooth, graphically superior baseball games like *World Series Baseball* and *R.B.I. Baseball '94*." *–GamePro* (May 1994)



Schiffer Publishing

Harley's Humongous Adventure

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1994.

Taking a cue from such films as *Dr. Cyclops* (1940), *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), and *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* (1989), *Harley's Humongous Adventure* puts players in the title role of a cool scientist who has accidentally shrunk himself. Since size truly does matter, Harley must search for the scattered pieces of his shattered shrinking machine, a task that gamers should enjoy.

As Harley walks, runs, jumps, ducks, swims, climbs, and jetpacks through his obstacle-ridden house, he uses nails, tacks, rubber bands, marbles, firecrackers, and bug spray to battle creepy critters, including the Rat, your most formidable enemy. Each time you defeat the Rat, he changes in appearance and gets stronger. Rat will also collect weapons to prevent you from getting them, but when he drops them during battles, you can pick them up. Levels include The Lab 1, The Kitchen, Playroom (two levels), The Closet, Rat, The Bathroom, Library (two levels), Harley's Room (two levels), The Rat is Back, The Attic, The Roof (two levels), The Backyard, The Lab 2, and Last Stand. Known in Japan as *Kagakusha Harley no Haran Banjou* (*Chemist Harley's Stormy Life*).

Notable Quotable:

"I was very proud of it, especially considering that it was my first professional game out of college . . . All of the programming was straight assembly code, and every cycle and every byte counted. It took really skilled programmers to make those games—it's not like today where pretty much anyone can make a game . . . My boss at Visual Concepts came up with the idea, and I'm sure *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* played some role in there, but I think the original *Incredible Shrinking Man* had more to do with it than anything . . . Colin Silverman did the art for *Harley*, and he was one of the best that I ever worked with. I actually still have a huge framed *Harley's Humongous Adventure* poster over my desk right now. I look at it every day, and it's been here for the last nineteen years." –Brian Greenstone (via www.rvgfanatic.com), designer of *Harley's Humongous Adventure*

Insider Insight:
When I was in the sixth grade, I vividly remember being outside for field day. My friend Johnathon had brought the latest issue of *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. While I was waiting in line to participate in one of the activities, I turned the page in that magazine to a forthcoming game called *Harley's Humongous Adventure*. Judging by the pictures, it had everything I wanted in a video game. I didn't understand much about the game or how good it was going to be, but I knew that it had jetpacks!

Months passed, and by the time summer rolled around, I had forgotten all about the game. Then one day we went to our local rental store, and there it was on the shelf, so we picked it up for the week. The game was way better than I could have hoped for, and that week I locked myself in my room and didn't contact much of the outside world until I completed it. The game was quite difficult at first, but with some practice I got good at it, and I rented it at least three more times before the year was over.

Just recently I dabbled in playing *Harley's Humongous Adventure* again. The nostalgia really hit me hard, and it brought me back to that summer and how fun the game was. The only difference being I'm terrible at it now and didn't make it past the fifth stage. It's still a fantastic game, though. –Raymond Fix

Scrifer Publishing LTD

Harvest Moon

PUBLISHER: Natsume.
DEVELOPER: Amccus.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game/Life Development Simulator, 1 player.
YEAR: 1997.

The first game in a long-running series, *Harvest Moon* puts players in the role of a farmer who must clear land of stumps and boulders, planet seeds to grow grass and vegetables, harvest crops, raise cows and chickens, go fishing in the mountains, visit towns to buy and sell items (including cows, herbs, and various foods), use wood to build fences and expand the farm house, go to church to meet people, attend social events to meet women, and much more. Players can even get married and have a baby.

There are numerous tools to use in this relatively complex, top-down game, including a hammer (for breaking up boulders and old fencing), a sickle (for cutting hay), an axe (for breaking up stumps), and a bell (for gathering your herd). Structures to store the things you accumulate include a silo (grass), a cow barn, a chicken coop, a storage shed (seeds and tools), and a horse stable. A variety of natural and social events occur as you play, such as earthquakes and lightning that open passages to new areas, and festivals where you can receive prizes. Followed by *Harvest Moon 64* (N64) and various other sequels.

Notable Quotable:

"Later Harvest Moons added complexity and refined some of the mechanics, but the first is still surprisingly enjoyable. It's satisfying to make progress in building up a farm that's truly your own, without suffering through any of that pesky physical labor. The two-and-a-half year cap is disappointing, but encourages multiple playthroughs, and the multiple endings reward players for improving each time. It is, however, ultimately a game about chores, and as such will not be for everyone. But if you're curious, give it a try. Tending virtual crops might be more fun than you'd expect." –Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Insider Insight:

I first laid eyes on *Harvest Moon* because my cousin curiously picked it up at a video game rental store. We brought it to his house, plugged it in, and fired it up. We had never even heard of *Harvest Moon*, let alone farming simulators, and after a few minutes of aimlessly running around, my cousin became bored and frustrated and shut it off. He wouldn't let me play because he thought the game was stupid.

Not long after that, my Aunt Patty introduced me to *Harvest Moon* all over again. She showed me the basic mechanics: how to grow crops, how to raise animals, how to make the villagers like you, etc. I was blown away—it was so much different than *Super Mario World* and *Donkey Kong Country*. I fell HARD for *Harvest Moon*!

It's safe to say *Harvest Moon* was the first video game I ever considered myself "addicted" to. Today, farming simulation games are some of my all-time favorites, and they are the most cathartic video games for me to play. –Brittney Brombacher

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Head-On Soccer

PUBLISHER: U.S. Gold.
DEVELOPER: U.S. Gold.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer, 1–8 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

A fast, arcade-style game, *Head-On Soccer* features a twenty-eight-team World Tournament comprised of squads from the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Europe (there are fifty teams total). As the tournament progresses, gamers can add star players to their roster. In addition to standard moves, each star player can cross and back-heel the ball, and each has a special ability, such as latching onto an opposing player, making more accurate passes, jumping with the ball tucked between his feet, or kicking harder toward the goal. Those not wanting to commit to a tournament can play Exhibition mode.

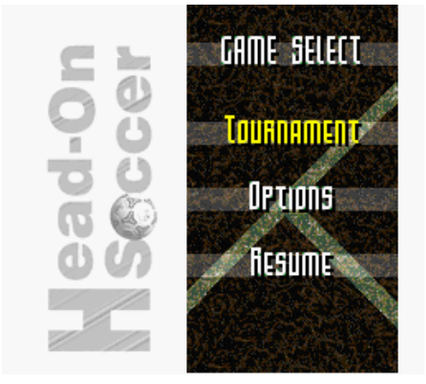
Other features include: replays, penalty kicks, headers, fouls (one mode of play makes fouls rare, meaning players can be rough), slide tackles, free kicks, three difficulty levels, and varying field conditions: wet grass, rock, and sand. The action is viewed from an isometric perspective. Also released for the Genesis. Known as *Mario Basler: Jetzt geht's Los!* in Germany. Released as *Fever Pitch* for the Atari Jaguar, and in various foreign countries.

Notable Quotable:

"Implementing the star players' special moves really juices up the action. If other soccer sims seem slow to you, this fast and furious version of the sport may keep you coming back for more." –*GamePro* (August 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"A realistic view of the field combined with great sound effects, this game has everything, including cool player animations plus power-ups and special kicks. I'm not a big soccer fan, but next to *FIFA Soccer*, this is one of my favorites. U.S. Gold took a lot of time and effort to make this game incredible. They've done the job and done it well." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1995)



Schiffer Publishing, LTD.

Hit the Ice

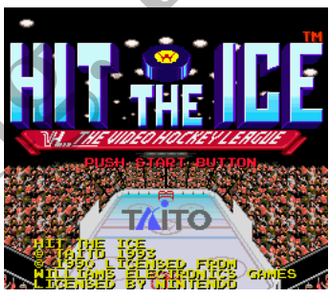
PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Taito.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Hockey, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

Based on Williams' 1990 arcade game, which has better voice effects, *Hit the Ice* for the SNES is a chaotic game of three-on-three hockey. The players are big, cartoonish, and colorful, and gamers can perform such traditional moves as passes, slap shots, and checks, the last of which play a big role in the game. Less traditional are super shots, which are so powerful that they knock down the goalie. There are few rules, and brawls frequently break out, emphasizing the arcade-style nature of the gameplay. The losing fighter's team skates slower for a short time.

Gamers can play against each other or team up to battle the computer. Exhibition and Championship modes are available. A vocal, highly animated crowd looks on, but the scraping noise of the skates grinding on the ice gets old in a hurry. If a player gets behind by five points, he can imbibe a power drink that temporarily enhances his skating and shooting ability (this drink cost money in the arcade version). Lack of licensing prevents the use of real players, but there are parodies of NHL greats, including "Gunner" Hall (Glen Hall), Phil Bonker (Phil Esposito) and Wayne Greatman (Wayne Gretzky). *Hit the Ice* is sort of the hockey version of *Arch Rivals* or *NBA Jam*, but it's not as good as either of those titles. Also released for the Genesis, TurboGrafx-16 (enhanced with four-player action and Shot Race mode), and Game Boy (also includes Shot Race mode).

Memories:
I grew up (and still live in) the Dallas/Fort Worth area, so, like most people in the south, ice hockey hasn't been a big part of my life. However, I was excited when the Dallas Stars, who relocated to Texas from Minnesota for the 1993–94 NHL season, won the Stanley Cup in 1999. My favorite hockey video game of all time is *Blades of Steel* for the NES. I like the simple, fast-paced, nicely controlled, six-on-six action, and it's a blast when a fight breaks out—a terrific and raucous two-player experience. *Hit the Ice* has some of that arcade-style appeal.

Notable Quotable:
"It frustrates me to no end how there are so many home versions of *Hit the Ice*, and none of them are any good. This wacky, arcade-style hockey game deserved better. The TurboGrafx edition offered fluid graphics but lacked options and speed. The Genesis game had the speed and options, but poor graphics and audio. The SNES version boasts the best audio-visual quality by a mile. The players have reflections, and the arena looks so razor sharp you can make out the fans' facial expressions. But as my friend Brent lamented, 'The players look terrific until they start moving.' The animation is erratic, and I can't recall ever seeing so much graphic breakup in a 16-bit title. The puck is hard to follow as it blinks from one spot to the next. Once the oversized players crowd up, you'll have no idea what the [expletive] is going on. On a positive note, the audio is crystal clear, and you can actually understand the voices. I love the sound of the puck clanking off the 'pipe' (which happens all the time, by the way). It's hard to score in this game! The action zooms in close during the one-on-one fights, which are a little more sophisticated than other versions. There are two types of punches, but the uppercut never seems to land." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)



hifer Publishing LTD

Home Alone

PUBLISHER: THQ.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering Inc.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

Home Alone finds intrepid youngster Kevin searching the bedrooms, bathrooms, hallways, game room, gym, and other areas of his house for various family valuables, such as jewels, electronics, and toys. He must do this to keep the items out of the hands of "Wet Bandits" Harry and Marv and their gang of burglars. Once Kevin has procured a certain number of valuables in a level (there's a countdown timer at the top of the screen), he must proceed down to the basement to secure them within the vault. If he collects more than the minimum number of items, he'll get bonus points. He can only carry a certain number of valuables in his backpack, so sometimes he'll need to deposit the collected amount down a laundry chute to a pile in the basement.

To uncover hidden valuables (many of which are easy to spot), Kevin will open doors, chests, boxes, cabinets, and the like. To battle the Wet Bandits, who chase him through the house, Kevin uses a water pistol (unlimited shots, fires quickly, but is a weak weapon), a slingshot (ten shots per slingshot found), baseballs (one throw per ball), and a BB Rifle (fifteen shots per rifle). In addition, Kevin can lure the bad guys to such traps and obstacles as banana peels, toy cars, and scattered thumbtacks.

Inspired by the hit 1990 feature film, which starred Macaulay Culkin (Kevin), Joe Pesci (Harry), and Daniel Stern (Marv), *Home Alone* for the SNES is much different than the more expansive Genesis rendition, which features five different houses, neighborhood sledding, and such weapons as a coal rifle, a snowball bazooka, and a sonic wave gun. The NES version is different as well as it focuses primarily on setting traps for the enemies. The Game Gear game is similar to the Genesis version while the Game Boy version plays a lot like the SNES cartridge.

Notable Quotable:

"The visuals are sufficiently adequate for a generation-one Nintendo 16-bit title . . . The sound effects are decently chosen, like the 'boing' sound after Kevin bounces off a bed, the 'bump' sound if Kevin hits his head on the ceiling, and the 'slide' sound for when Kevin throws vital items down the chute . . . gameplay structure is sound . . . the spirit of the movie is in evidence . . . there isn't much (if any) replay value because the items you're looking for are all in the same place no matter how many times you play; not to mention if you memorize every enemy pattern the game throws at you then the difficulty will be pretty non-existent . . . it can be beaten in roughly thirty minutes . . . neither the best nor the worst licensed game out there." – StarBlog (starboy91.blogspot.com)

Insider Insight:
Every kid in the '90s loved *Home Alone*. There was just something about watching the antics of Kevin McCallister taking down two idiotic robbers and nearly killing them every time that made the movie so enjoyable. When I found out about the Super Nintendo game, I was stoked! The best thing about it? This is actually one of few examples where a movie-licensed video game is actually GOOD! The game is loosely based on the movie, and it has everything you would want from it, most notably the ability to use traps and weapons to stop the bumbling Wet Bandits. This was a classic that I would rent on a fairly regular basis because it truly is that enjoyable of a game! –Eric Perez

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Home Alone 2:
Lost in New York

PUBLISHER: THQ.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering, Inc.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

Loosely based on the 1992 feature film, *Home Alone 2* finds you, as Kevin, separated from your family once again. It's the Christmas season, but this time Kevin is in New York City, including the Plaza Hotel (where you must run to the end of a hallway before going up to another floor, for some inexplicable reason), Central Park, his uncle's townhouse, the city streets, and the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center (a truly bizarre ending to the game). Kevin runs, jumps, ducks, dodges suitcases, rings for the elevator, avoids pillows thrown by maids, dodges hopping suitcases and flying trashcan lids, finds keys for unlocking doors, searches for items, climbs walls, avoids falling plaster and TV sets, and, among other bosses, battles a hopping, knife-throwing master chef who sheds an article of clothing with each hit, oddly enough, then explodes into cookies when defeated.

Kevin fights enemies—thugs, rats, an old lady wielding an umbrella, a fat guy in a suit, etc.—using a nifty sliding attack maneuver, and he can shoot darts and deploy flying fists and super flying fists. Weapons are plentiful, but ammo is scarce, causing some frustration. Power-ups to grab include pizza (extra lives), cookies (health recovery), pigeons (spin-jump that knocks away enemies), credit cards (invincibility), and after shave (speed, longer jump, temporary invulnerability). The game looks good and includes digitized cut scenes from the movie, and it has a certain quirky charm, but spotty collision detection and flawed and inconsistent level design ruin the fun. The levels are short as well. Similar to the NES and Game Boy versions, but much different than the Genesis cart.

Notable Quotable:

"*Home Alone 2* was irresistible because it not only typifies the mediocre movie-to-game movement that's sweeping video game developers, but also typifies THQ programming. In what is basically a platform game with no platforms, a shooting game with no guns, and an adventure game with no sense of adventure, *Home Alone 2* barely even taps the system's capabilities. The opening music sounds like the movie theme played on a Casio Home Organ . . . The graphics [are] extremely two dimensional. The gameplay, while not awful, could have used a bit of work . . . what's the point of having a full screen of graphics if you can only move around the bottom half? . . . I didn't enjoy this game, and wonder if even the sappiest of *Home Alone 2* fans would." –Joe Santulli *(Digital Press* fanzine #21, September/October 1994)

Digital Press, LLC

Home Improvement:
Power Tool Pursuit!

PUBLISHER: Absolute Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering Inc.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/ Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

An adventurous take on the *Home Improvement* TV series (1991–1999), which starred Tim Allen as Tim "The Tool Man" Taylor, this game has you, as Tim, journeying through four worlds, each with four levels. Tim runs, jumps, and collects metal nuts, and he swings, lowers, and raises himself with a grappling hook. He also uses such weapons as a nail gun, a blowtorch (flamethrower), and a chainsaw (which hurls expanding energy waves) to battle such baddies as birds, dinosaurs, mummies, and robots. Some larger enemies, like the dinosaurs, take a lot of shots to kill. To break through weak floors and walls, Tim wields a sledgehammer or a jackhammer.

The game moves quickly. Tim runs up and down steep hills, and the metal nuts he collects are similar to the rings in *Sonic the Hedgehog*. When Tim gets hit, his nuts go flying (insert joke here), but they are harder to gather up than the rings in *Sonic*. Tim can shoot up, down, and diagonally, à la *Contra*. The game also borrows elements of *Pitfall!* (swinging, adventuring) and *Mega Man X* (controls). Tim's objective in each level is to find several boxes of tools before moving on to the next area. According to the game's storyline, Binford has named a new tool line after Tim, and industrial agents have stolen the prototypes of the tools from the *Tool Time* set.

Fun Fact:
There's no true instruction manual for *Home Improvement*. Rather, it has a fake manual with a sticker plastered over it claiming, "Real men don't need instructions."

Notable Quotable:
"The game moves along competently enough, but there's something about watching Allen tussle with dinosaurs that makes me want to take out a tool kit and disassemble my Super NES." –*Entertainment Weekly* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"You gotta navigate this completely repetitive and mind-bending landscape . . . most of the time you just end up running in circles . . . you can usually tell how blatantly terrible a game is gonna be if it's made like this—with the whole collect X in Y level before reaching the exit sort of thing . . . the way it was done in *Mighty Max* and in this game are the completely wrong way to do it . . . I guess this was just the good old formula for making a game suck back in the 16-bit era . . . they made sure that no matter what you're doing, when you're doing it, you're gonna be getting hit by something. It's freaking infuriating!" –JonTron (YouTube)

Insider Insight:
Throughout the '80s and '90s, many movies and television shows got the video game treatment. Unfortunately, most of these games were not worth the cost of materials to create them. There were occasionally exceptions to the rule, and one I was hoping could escape this stigma was *Home Improvement*.

Growing up in a family were things got repaired and made instead of replaced or bought, it was only natural that one of the shows we all got together to watch was *Home Improvement*. I remember heading to the local rental store looking for a game to rent for the weekend when the box caught my eye. As a fan of the show, I was excited—who wouldn't want to play as Tim "The Toolman" Taylor in worlds with dinosaurs, mummies, aliens, and ghosts? I suppose I was naive to think this game would be worth my time, but I had to give it a chance.

On the way home from the store, I looked in the instruction manual to try and learn more about the game, only to see the bold text "Real Men Don't Need Instructions" spread across the pages. Nowadays, I can appreciate the joke they were going for, but as a kid looking to understand the game it proved disappointing.

I recently revisited *Home Improvement: Power Tool Pursuit!*, and I can say it is exactly as I remember. While playable (it isn't quite as bad as the reviews make it out to be), it fails to pull you into the story. Its camera style is infuriating at times, and the repetitive nature of the levels combined with uninspired boss battles leave much to be desired. Even so, hardcore fans of the show might want to give it a shot. –Anthony J. La Gambina

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

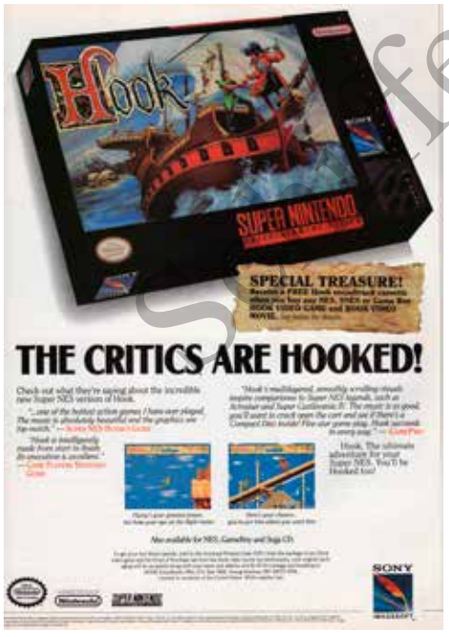
Hook

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Ukiyotei.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/ Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

As in the virtually identical Genesis rendition, *Hook* for the SNES has players guiding Peter Pan through Neverland, battling giant earthworms, night snakes, magic tigers, and pirates (which are armed with swords, daggers, bombs, and other weapons), along with other enemies, including Rufio and Winter Hawk. Armed with a dagger, Peter traverses the following levels: The Nevertree, Neverland Forest, Neverland Rocky Mountains, Neverland Waterfall and Lagoon, Neverland Underground, Neverland Ice and Snow Region (where platforms are slippery), Neverland Over the Forest, Neverland Skeleton Rock, Pirate Town, Pirate Ship, and Hook (which is a duel against Hook in the town square).

In addition to running and jumping, Peter can crouch, swim, and fly. In order to fly, you must press the jump button twice after Tinkerbell has powdered Peter Pan with her patented pixie dust. Peter can also equip a sword that shoots star balls, but he will lose it when he gets hit, and it will pop up somewhere else in Neverland. Based on the 1991 Steven Spielberg film, which starred Robin Williams as Peter and Dustin Hoffman as Captain Hook. The movie was also adapted for the Game Gear and Sega CD, the latter version featuring an audio narrative, digitized scenes from the film, computer images of Hook's ship, and CD-quality music from the movie soundtrack. The NES and Game Boy versions are much different.

Fun Fact:
In 1992, the same year that the *Hook* movie was adapted for the SNES, Irem produced a *Hook* beat-'em-up arcade game featuring four-player simultaneous action, including three playable Lost Boys.



Notable Quotable:
"The whole package looks fantastic. Great artwork, excellent animated sequences in the intro, lots of amazing graphics and sound. It's a real pity the gameplay's not to the same standard." *–N-Force* (September 1992)

Insider Insight:
When *Hook* was released in theaters, the prospect of a video game based on the film was highly appealing. When the game hit stores almost a year later, my family and I were ecstatic to jump right in and play, so we made our way to the rental store—as we often did on weekends—and found a copy. Hearing the game's version of the film score only heightened our anticipation as the intro played out on our TV. Full of excitement, we dug into the game itself, and then wondered—what happened!?

The visuals were fun and the music was great, but Peter Pan moved so slowly it took seemingly forever to get him anywhere. We even changed out the controller, thinking it might have been malfunctioning . . . nope! My brother and I sat frustratingly trying to get over the slow gameplay, only to realize that the game itself was poorly designed. With anticipation being mighty, especially with a game that held true to the movie it was based on, it was a shame that it had such a sluggish main character.

Some twenty years later, I returned to the game my brother and I had given up on, hoping that it might not be as rough as we remembered. With a nostalgic smile, I tried to give it another chance, only to be let down once again. Age has given me more patience, but not enough resolve to keep going with *Hook*. –Zoe K. Howard

Super Fer Publishing LTD

The Hunt for Red October

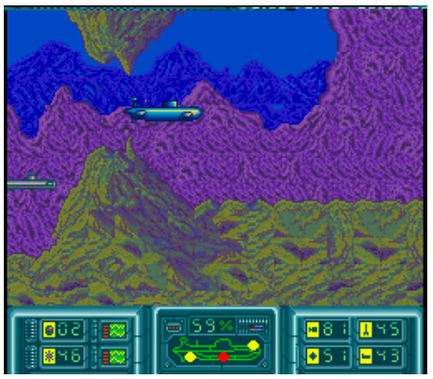
PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Riedel Software Productions.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Shooter/ Light Gun Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Loosely based on the 1990 film, which in turn was based on Tom Clancy's 1984 debut novel, *The Hunt for Red October* for the SNES takes place during the latter stages of the Cold War. You are Soviet Captain and defector Markio Ramius (played by Sean Connery in the movie), pilot of the Red October, the most powerful submarine in the world. Your vessel is equipped with torpedoes, bombs, surface and air missiles, and a cavitation drive, which enables the sub to move with stealth. It also has electronic counter measures (ECMs), a device that floats out in front of the ship and causes enemy ships and subs to temporarily cease firing.

The game has nine different missions, including destroying an island stronghold harboring illegal arms merchants, escorting the Atlantic Queen cruise ship, and defending offshore drilling platforms that have been targeted by saboteurs. There are four theaters of operation: the Caribbean, the North Pacific, the Mediterranean, and the Soviet Union. Gameplay is a slow, underwater, side-scrolling shooter where you can fire at enemies above and below the surface. Certain missions support (but do not require) the Super Scope rifle. During these missions, you guide crosshairs around the screen, firing away at ships and planes.

Notable Quotable:

"If you came to this expecting something like the movie, you'll feel betrayed. This is an easy cash-in. It snubs the license that could have made it something more than an average shooting scroller, but that's what you're left with. Play *688 Attack Sub* if you want a good submarine sim, play *R-Type* if you want arcade action, and watch the movie or read the book if you want *Red October*. Just don't go near this game." –Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)



Schiffer Publishing LTD

Hurricanes

PUBLISHER: U.S. Gold.
DEVELOPER: Probe Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1994.

A co-production of the U.S. and U.K., *Hurricanes* (1993–1997) was an animated series about a fictional soccer team. Despite its obscure nature, the cartoon inspired this hard-to-find SNES cartridge, which, amazingly enough, is not a soccer game. Rather, it's a platformer in which gamers play as either blond American Cal Casey or bulky brunette Brit Napper Thompson. As your character walks, jumps, avoids traps, rides on elevators, moves across ropes, floats and rides on platforms, and collects trophies and medals, he dribbles a soccer ball (automatically) and kicks said ball into bad guys, scorpions, and other enemies.

After the projectile ball hits the enemy or goes a certain distance across the screen (holding the button makes it go further), it quickly returns to your character's foot. Unlike *Marko* for the Genesis, another platformer with a soccer ball weapon, the ball doesn't have other uses, such as letting you jump higher. It can pop, however, such as when it hits a cactus, but a new ball will appear shortly thereafter. In addition, you can upgrade it to a more powerful metal ball (which you would think would hurt your character's foot). Areas to journey through in this typical platformer with an atypical weapon include such locales as an island, a jungle, a mine, a temple, a lagoon, and an airport.

Notable Quotable:

"I'm not a big fan of *Hurricanes* on the SNES and not just because it made me replay everything from the start every three lives, though that certainly helped me build up a good hate for it. Even if it had infinite continues, a world map, heat-seeking explosive homing balls, and a mullet editor, I still wouldn't enjoy it much. I mean, it's not a terrible game at all, and it's actually pretty slick and well put together at times; there's definitely stuff to like here. But the character movement isn't quite right (the way he keeps pausing and speeding up into a run doesn't help), the level design can be unnecessarily cruel, and I just didn't find the gameplay to be interesting enough to put up with it." – Super Adventures in Gaming (superadventuresingaming.blogspot.com)

Scanfer Publishing

Hyper V-Ball

PUBLISHER: Mc O'River.
DEVELOPER: Video System.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Volleyball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Hampered by a restrictive side-view perspective, which eliminates lateral movement, *Hyper V-Ball* is a four-on-four volleyball game that lets you play against the computer or a human opponent, or you can simply watch a match. Men's League and Woman's League offer standard (if simplified) volleyball action while Hyper League mode, which features half-man, half-machine players outfitted in hyper-suits, lets gamers perform a variety of outlandish moves, such as the Tornado Serve and the Hurricane Spike. The Hyper League features eight fictional teams: Lethal Machines, Metal Breakers, Power Spikers, Turbo Force, Neo Crashers, Steel Strikers, Iron Fangs, and Grooscaps.

For gamers who like to tinker with the settings and add their own personality to the game, the best thing about *Hyper V-Ball* is a battery-backed team creation and editing program that allows you to assign various skills to each player and to create team names, player names, and team colors. There are four spaces for player-created teams. Known in Japan as *Super Volley 2*. Similar to *Super Volleyball* (Genesis).

Notable Quotable:

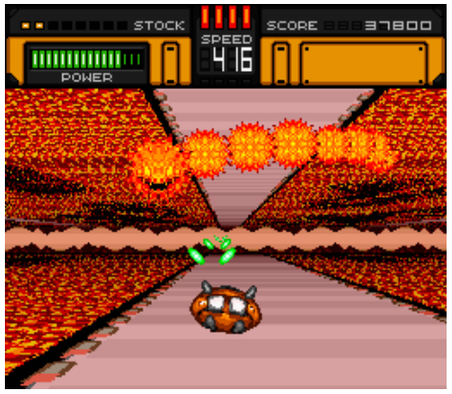
"*Hyper V-Ball* actually manages to capture the spirit and intensity of volleyball fairly well while still providing an entertaining experience for the player . . . The regular volleyball play is surprisingly realistic for only using a two-dimensional space . . . The pace can be a bit slow at times, with the ball traveling at a snail's pace through the air, but this only serves to give the player more time to react and adjust to what's happening. Where the game really gets fun is in the Hyper League." –Yes Guy Gaming (yesguygaming.com)

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

HyperZone

PUBLISHER: HAL Laboratory.
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory.
GAME TYPE: Futuristic Racing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

Borrowing shooting elements from *Space Harrier* and emulating the overall look of *F-Zero*, *HyperZone* is a colorful outer space shooter in which players pilot five different ships (varying in speed, power, and weapons) down futuristic, Mode 7-enhanced "highways," blasting away at hostile aliens while avoiding fireballs and space junk. Straying off the road into radiation areas zaps the ship's energy, but cruising over panels in the road restores power and repairs ship damage. The viewpoint is from behind the ship, and players can maneuver up, down, right, and left, but the course never veers from its stubbornly straight pathway, making for some mind-numbingly repetitive shooting action. The sound effects are serviceable at best, but the music is fast and far out, and the landscaping is otherworldly. "Hyper" gamers will appreciate all the shooting, but the game is too repetitious and one-dimensional to put players "in the zone."



Insider Insight:
HyperZone was one of the first 16-bit games I owned; I got it for Christmas the same year we got our Super Nintendo. At a glance, it felt like a poor man's *F-Zero*, and initially I dismissed it as such. My brothers and I, though, ended up spending a lot of time really enjoying the game. Honestly, it had more in common with games like *Space Harrier* or *Rad Racer* than with *F-Zero*, per se—it was a bit of a hybrid animal, really. *HyperZone* is polished, as to be expected from a HAL Laboratories game, with vibrant, colorful art, a decent soundtrack, and fast, enjoyable, arcade-style gameplay. I came to love the game and its mixed-bag design. *F-Zero* with laser guns and boss fights? Sure, why not?

The level designs were iconic and boldly visualized, and they had real gameplay depth and nicely balanced difficulty. Little bits of polish like the animation of your pilot boarding your vehicle as a robotic gantry lowered it into in launch position, and other little nuances throughout the game really helped bring things to life. The play-control was tight and responsive, and the sense of reward you felt each time you got a new vehicle as you progressed was meaningful and genuine. It might not have been as popular or as memorable overall as *F-Zero*, but *HyperZone* was good, straightforward, engaging fun—and it still is. –Kale Menges

Schiffer Publishing LTD

The Ignition Factor

PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: Jaleco.
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter/Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

This top-down game puts you in the role of a firefighter, entering buildings, rescuing people trapped inside, grabbing items (watches, keycards, gold bars, etc.), avoiding making contact with flames, and shooting flames with your fire extinguisher. Prior to each level, you attend a briefing where you look at a map of the building and select from a list of items to equip: an axe (for opening doors), a rope (for crossing certain areas), an oxygen tank and mask, a chemical fire extinguisher, and an electrical fire extinguisher. You can also use CO2 bombs, plastic explosives, a pole (for checking to see if floors are safe), and a fire truck (for clearing pathways and extinguishing large areas that are on fire). You always carry a standard fire extinguisher, but lugging around too many other items will slow you down and make you unable to kick in doors.

You will encounter other firefighters, and there is strategy involved, as certain extinguishers only work on certain types of fires. You should proceed quickly in order to rescue a certain number of people before time expires. Stages include: Pygmalion Products, Bradshaw Steel Mill, McGlone Mine, Whitney Appliances, Dino Park, Paris Mine, Shylock Center, and Gemini Towers. If you have scored enough points after those eight stages, you can play a bonus level: DM Headquarters. Music is minimal, but the sound effects help give the action a sense of urgency. This is a quality title with unusual gameplay. Known in Japan as *Fire Fighting*.

Notable Quotable:

"The game is solid for what it is, and firefighting isn't a theme that video games have explored very thoroughly—so this one certainly stands out. But for me, the simulation parts ultimately hurt the fun factor. However accurate it may be, it's just not that exciting to be in control of a fireman inside an inferno and watch him walk along at a snail's pace, all because he decided to pick up an extra medical kit . . . *The Ignition Factor* is good, and certainly worth a look, but it won't ignite everyone's sense of fun." –Lucas M. Thomas (www.ign.com)

Scholar Publishing

Illusion of Gaia

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Quintet.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Boasting more than sixty hours of gameplay, *Illusion of Gaia* finds Will Freedan on a quest through ruins, dungeons, pyramid chambers, and other areas to reunite with his father. The action takes place in a fantasy version of Earth during the age of exploration (16th century), and you'll encounter such historical locations as The Great Wall of China and The Tower of Babel.

Guided by the Spirit of the Earth (Gaia), who gives advice and dispenses magical powers, Will must converse with townsfolk to gather clues, solve puzzles (by flipping switches, moving blocks and the like), dash quickly to smash obstacles and climb steep hills, slide through narrow openings or into foes, collect jewels to trade for items and powers, and destroy monsters to garner extra hit points, strength, lives, and defense. To progress from one area to the next, you must defeat all the enemies.

Will, who uses a flute for battling and telekinesis to move objects, can fight in his standard form, and at times he can transform into either of two alter egos: dark knight Freedan, who wields a sword, and Shadow, who fires crescent beams. The successor to *Soul Blazer*, *Illusion of Gaia* is known in Japan as *Gaia Gensouki* and in Europe and Australia as *Illusion of Time*. The sequel, *Terranigma*, didn't make it to the U.S.

Notable Quotable:

"*Gaia* is full of great stuff. The graphics are sharp and glossy, the music is heroic (but not annoying), and the dungeons are deep and just puzzling enough to be challenging. And in a move we're seeing more and more, *Gaia* uses arcade action for its battles rather than static, RPG-style screens. Best of all, *Illusion of Gaia* is huge. If you like 'em big—and who doesn't—*Gaia* will keep you tied up for a good long while." –*Game Players* (August 1994)

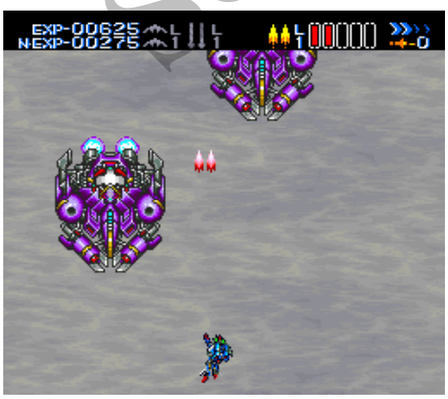
Insider Insight:
One of my favorite all-time SNES games is *A Link to the Past*, so it should be no surprise that I completely fell for Nintendo's marketing when it came to *Illusion of Gaia*. Nintendo really wanted folks to buy this game, so they pulled out all the stops. They made the font look like it was part of the Zelda series, they included a mini-player's guide right in the box, they put out these awesome little fold-out ad pamphlet things in video game magazines with a $10 off coupon, and the first round of carts even came with a free T-shirt, which I proudly wore to school every week. And you know what? Nintendo was absolutely right to push this game, because it's fantastic! From the amazing water effects in the first town to the epic score and gigantic bosses, *Illusion of Gaia* is truly Super NES gaming at its finest. It may not live up to some of the other legends on the platform, but it is an absolute must-play for anyone who's a fan of 16-bit games. It's also the reason I know what the word "scurvy" means. Learning is fun! –Kris Randazzo

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Imperium

PUBLISHER: Vic Tokai.
DEVELOPER: Jorudan.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

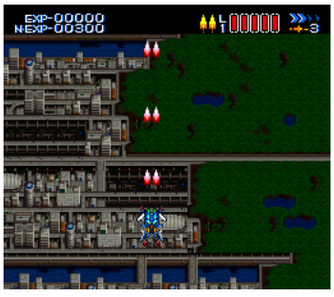
Viewed from overhead, *Imperium* has you flying a futuristic ship over oceans, deserts, ruined cities, battleships, and outer space installations (there are six levels in all), firing at an assortment of enemies, including boats, pods, spaceships, and giant robots (some of which evoke such creatures as lobsters and octopi). You are given one life with a five-hit energy meter. Destroying enemies gives you RPG-like experience points, an unusual and welcome feature in a shooter. You begin the game with standard red bullets. With each experience level reached, you'll earn a wave gun, then lasers, then a directional starburst, which fires the opposite way you move. After you earn all four weapons, the next experience level reached will improve your red bullets to level two. This will continue until all four weapons are powered up times three. If you get hit, the current weapon you are using goes down one level, and you lose a bar on your energy meter.



You can also grab Vulcan missiles that enemies drop. These act as smart bombs/strafing missiles that damage all onscreen enemies and make you temporarily invincible. *Imperium* has three difficulty levels, and you can toggle between four ship speeds at any time. There is some strategy involved in what weapon to equip at various points in the game, such as boss battles. This is an intense shooter with ample challenge, but it does have slowdown when the screen gets overly crowded. Known in Japan as *Kidou Soukou Dion*.

Notable Quotable:

"Though the game has a health bar, it is anything but easy. There are many enemies onscreen, sometimes appearing behind you, and they have smart bullet patterns. The bosses have unusual attacks that can take up a lot of screen real estate . . . The game immediately showcases its graphical prowess with nice anime pixel art and Mode 7 effects in the intro and title screen. The graphics in-game are also decent, with bright colors, detailed sprites, and animated backgrounds. The bosses are the height of the in-game visuals with their varied designs, giant sprites, and effects. After you defeat each boss, you see a trippy background animation before proceeding to the next stage . . . The audio quality is just as high, with clear sounds and good music. There are multiple explosion sounds for the different sized enemies, and the weapons each have their own distinct sound. The music, composed by Tenpei Sato (the composer behind many Nippon Ichi titles like *Phantom Brave* and the SNES *Alien vs. Predator*), is fast and technical, which suits the game's frantic nature. The bosses need another mention because each one has their own theme. This game's soundtrack will find its way onto your playlist next to the *Raiden* and *Darius* soundtracks." –Brett Prichard (www.hardcoregaming101.net)



Schiffer Publishing LTD

Incantation

PUBLISHER: Titus Software.
DEVELOPER: Titus Software.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1996.

With a name like *Incantation*, you might expect this to be an RPG. You'd be wrong. It's actually a side-scrolling platform shooter where the only magic you use are "spells" that upgrade your wand/firing implement (with bombs, spread fire, homing missile, and the like), which shoots fireballs at fantasy creatures. When the boy magician you control stops, he pounds the wand in his hand like he's going to whack someone with it, giving him sort of a faux edgy attitude, a trope started by Sonic the Hedgehog.

There are medallions to collect throughout the caves, forests, mountains, and other areas you'll explore, and in each level you must find certain items in order to exit, so backtracking will rear its ugly head. Sometimes it is necessary to get a running start in order to leap over a chasm. At the end of each level, there's a generic-acting boss, such as one that hops back and forth and you must run under it, or one that bobs up and down overhead and drops bombs.

Gameplay is mediocre, but the graphics are colorful, rich, and replete with parallax scrolling and water effects. The game looks a lot like the better-playing *Rayman*, which hit the PlayStation the previous year. Unfortunately, the visuals get redundant as enemies are palette-swapped and terrain repeats itself. Also, the light-hearted music is forgettable. A hard-to-find game, *Incantation* was released late in the life of the SNES.

Notable Quotable:

"Although I'm positive I heard of it somewhere before (maybe in *Nintendo Power* magazine), I know the first time I ever actually saw *Incantation* was in the SNES bin at Funcoland. I thought maybe I had discovered some long-lost little gem of a side-scroller. Instead, what I got was a painful example of why everyone hates Titus . . . the best thing about *Incantation* is its graphics . . . *Incantation*'s sound is forgettable . . . Instead of medieval, epic, or creepy tunes, most levels have an obnoxious theme accompanied by a thumping bass that repeats every few notes. Sound effects are few and far between, and most are muffled or standard . . . One area of the game showed a little more potential in level design than the others, and that is a mountain where you have to move upwards while avoiding one-hit-kill rocks that bears drop on your head. Unfortunately, even this falls flat as any kind of an action challenge, because I only got hit by the rocks when I couldn't see them coming, and once I knew they were there, they no longer posed a threat . . . To say *Incantation* is uninspired is an understatement. It consists of the bare essentials of a playable game and nothing more." –Flying Omelette (www.flyingomelette.com)

Publisher Preview

The Incredible Crash Dummies

PUBLISHER: LJN.
DEVELOPER: Gray Matter.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

An evil crash dummy named Junkman has kidnapped Dr. Zub in order to drain his memory banks and steal the top-secret design for the TORSO-9000, which would make Junkman virtually indestructible. Enter Slick, a brave and friendly crash dummy that players control. To battle the various junkbots and other enemies populating the game, Slick can jump on them and throw wrenches. Slick can also run left and right, duck, skid, and jump over obstacles. For extra abilities, he can grab air bags, which enable him to float, and lightning bolts, which give him super speed.

Obstacles to negotiate through the game's sixteen stages (comprising a junkyard, a crash test center, a construction sit, and a military testing zone) include barbed wire, circular saws, oil slicks, crash cycles, and more. Getting hit by an enemy or obstacle makes Slick lose a limb, but he can reattach the last limb lost with a screwdriver. Bonus stages let Slick use a tank, a crash car, or other such vehicles to jump over obstacles and crash into a wall, or destroy a turbo-boosted bulldozer. Based on The Incredible Crash Dummies toy line, this humor-tinged, semi-entertaining platformer was also released for the Genesis. Much different than the Game Boy, Game Gear, and NES versions.

Notable Quotable:

"Anarchy is a groovy thing; it makes a great concept to argue about in pubs, and it spawned a classic punk anthem, but it just doesn't work in practice as *Crash Dummies* is solid proof of. A few moments into the second level it becomes painfully apparent that games need some structure to be fun . . . The hazards come thick and fast with several at any one time, making each zone a horribly long torture chamber where you've gotta memorize the dangers and react before they appear onscreen. The visuals may look too chunky and odd at times, but they animate smoothly on the whole. The main sprite is a little too big, making it way difficult to avoid the multiple debris crashing off most everything you kill . . . Infuriating in places, *Crash Dummies* isn't the game of the year, but there's never a shortage of people who want complicated, fast games that take practice to get through." –*SNES Force* (December 1993)

Insider Insight:

Although the game has been out for twenty-five years, I didn't play *The Incredible Crash Dummies* until last year when I started my Gem or Junk podcast series on ReviewFix.com. Nevertheless, those cool public service dolls of destruction were a big part of my childhood. For some reason or another, they just freaked me out. And I was a tough kid to spook—I watched Charles Bronson and Clint Eastwood flicks, and I even ate an ice cream sundae once while the gore-fest *Faces of Death* was on. I don't know what it was about the dummies, though, they were just weird. Kind of like how *Seinfeld*'s Cosmo Kramer feels about clowns.

At the same time, though, their message of "Buckle Up, It's the Law!" always resonated with me. As a kid, I'd never forget to buckle my seatbelt, partly because I thought they might pop up out of nowhere if I didn't. However, even at ten years old in 1993, I knew that the game based on them had to be trash. Why? It had that dreaded LJN logo on it. Over the years, LJN took all my favorite movies and made god-awful games out of them. *Back to the Future*? Garbage. *Friday the 13th*? Even worse. But when I started my podcast, I figured I had to play it. The end result was a wild one.

The Incredible Crash Dummies could have been an amazing platformer. The gimmick was cool—if you get hit by an enemy, you lose a piece of your body. Wait, it gets even wackier. After you lose your legs, it looks like you've become a dog with worms as you drag your rear end around the level. After that, you're basically a foot with a head. Sadly, the control is equivalent to driving drunk through a mall parking lot—it's virtually impossible to navigate the levels without getting killed. The game's just not any good.

That little experience made for a fun podcast, but also reconnected me with the true meaning of the Crash Test Dummies. My wife sometimes yells at me to buckle my seat belt, but after playing that terrible game for twenty-five minutes, I didn't have to be reminded again. –Patrick Hickey Jr.

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

The Incredible Hulk

PUBLISHER: U.S. Gold.
DEVELOPER: Probe Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Notable Quotable:

"Sadly, smashing is something the big guy is not given much of a chance to do. A scant handful of walls in the game are breakable. Instead, the Hulk is usually rerouted through sewers and underground paths when he encounters obstacles that normally would not stop him, such as a three-inch steel wall. Smashing straight through barriers is what the Hulk is about, not climbing ladders to go around them . . . The graphics are a high point, though, and mimic the artwork of the comics very well . . . The controls are decent, which isn't saying much, as there's so little for you to do with them. The game is also unreasonably short . . . your typical licensed game, with a strong and unique character's face put onto a formulaic scroller. Fans looking to play as their favorite demolisher will be disappointed by the extreme lack of demolishing to be had. It's an average platform game, but a pretty crappy Hulk game, as there's so few unique things implemented into the game that truly reflect the character and the universe." –Just Games Retro (just-gamesretro.com)

The Incredible Hulk stars a weakened, watered-down version of the popular Marvel comic book character. The Jade Giant is nicely rendered, but he walks slowly, jumps pitifully (compared to his comic book counterpart), and punches redundantly through five levels of ho-hum action: City & Construction Site, Tyrannus' Labyrinth, Leader's Fortress, The Leader's Interior, and Final Confrontation. Hulk can grab and throw enemies (including robots, Romans, lizards, and slugs) and items (including jeeps, pillars, and phone booths), and he can transform into Super Hulk, who has ceiling smash, sonic clap, foot mash, and double punch capabilities. He can even regress to his alter-ego, Bruce Banner, who can explore areas not accessible to the Hulk. Comic book-based bosses include Leader, Tyrannus, Rhino, Absorbing Man, and Abomination. Unfortunately, none of these potentially exciting elements make the game any good. Also released for the Genesis and Game Gear.

Insider Insight:

People today take for granted just how easy it is to research a game to find out if it's good or not. Back in the '90s, standing in front of a wall of games at a rental store with only cover art, a small description, and a few screen shots, and with your parents in the car waiting on you, making a decision as to what would dictate your weekend's entertainment was not easy. That's why I probably played more licensed games while growing up than I perhaps should have— if you placed me in front of two game boxes, one with the Hulk's face on it, and the other with the words "Chrono Trigger," at least I knew what the Hulk was.

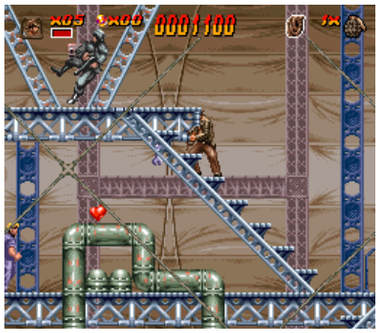
Judging by *The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction* for a relatively modern console like the PlayStation 2, it would appear that crafting a game for the Hulk would be effortless. However, going by the Jade Giant's first game on the SNES, simply titled *The Incredible Hulk*, you'd think that he didn't have much of a future in the video game business. Despite having a jazzy soundtrack, graphics that capture the look of the comic, and an interesting mechanic where you can change to Hulk's alter ego, *The Incredible Hulk* is one of the most unnecessarily difficult games to grace the SNES.

Playing it back then, and even retrying it now with the help of the internet, I can't even complete the first level! The game is a simple 2D side-scrolling action platformer, and you figure that with a character like the Hulk who gets more powerful as he takes damage, it would be a breeze. That isn't the case, though, as you get overwhelmed by the sheer volume of stage enemies and are easily toppled by bosses like the Abomination and the Rhino. On the other hand, perhaps I'm just not very good at video games. According to *GamePro* reviewer Scary Larry, *The Incredible Hulk* is "surprisingly tame. Most gamers could play through it in one evening, probably between dinner and dessert." –Blair Farrell

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures

PUBLISHER: JVC.
DEVELOPER: Factor 5.
GAME TYPE: Action/Adventure/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.



Incorporating a variety of scenes from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), this game puts players in the whip wielding, grenade throwing, gun toting title role, journeying through twenty-eight levels (the streets of Cairo, a Peruvian temple, the Himalayan Mountains, the Pankot Caves in India, etc.) populated by Nazis, swordsmen, rats, wolves, birds, soldiers, and other enemies. In addition to punching, whipping, shooting, and blowing up baddies (you can find weapons in clay pots and satchels scattered about the levels), Indy must dodge gunfire, use awnings like trampolines, leap and swing over such obstacles as water pits, canyons, and lava, and much more, including running from a giant boulder and battling a Nazi commander on a tank heading off a cliff. Special Mode 7 levels let you ride a runaway mine cart, fly a biplane, and careen down an icy cliff on a rubber raft. Epic gameplay and strong production values make this one of the better movie-based games of the 16-bit era.

Notable Quotable:

"Between certain stages, you are treated to some static shots from the three movies, accompanied by text to help push the story along. The screen captures are really well done . . . Indiana Jones fans will really get a charge out of this . . . I played the game to death when it came out in 1994, and I have enjoyed coming back to it as the new film [2008's *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*] casts a shadow over pop culture. Definitely check it out if you are a fan of classic platforming, as it provides a good challenge as well as being a great example of how to make a licensed game." –Levi Buchanan (www.ign.com), reviewing the SNES game downloaded to the Wii.

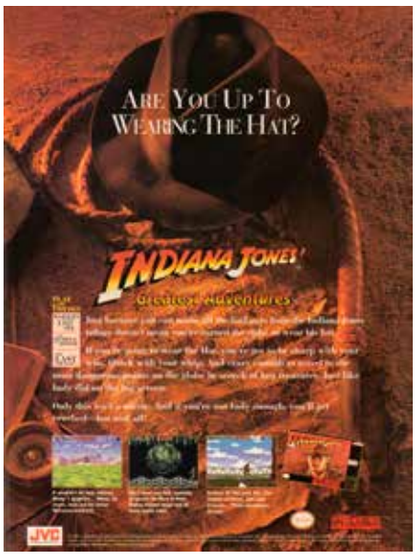
Notable Quotable:

"The game's got the spirit of the series nailed, which helps to keep the levels fresh and helps make fans smile. It's little touches that remind you of moments from the films, like ducking from table to table to avoid gunfire in Club Obi-Wan, dodging walls of flame in the Venice catacombs, or fist-fighting atop a tank before it rolls off the cliff. There's even a giant swordsman boss at the end of the Cairo level who appropriately falls to a single bullet. If you love the films, you'll love the references. If you just love platform gaming, I think you'll still enjoy the winks, nods, and variety they bring . . . it's a great platformer. It follows the formula of the Super Star Wars trilogy to the letter, but takes the best parts of each. It's rarely complicated, often gorgeous, and always fun. Adventure has a name, and his name is worth being stamped on this cart." –Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Insider Insight:
I used to get called "Indiedarran Jones" at school, so as you can imagine I've always had an affinity for the silver screen's most famous archaeologist. Sadly, his games haven't always been as thrilling as his onscreen adventures, so I approached *Greatest Adventures* with a fair amount of caution. That caution was well-founded because it's a bloody tough game.

When I picked up an import copy of *Super Star Wars* on Christmas Eve one year, I'd completed the game by Boxing Day. It was thrilling, but it was easy and presented very little challenge. Not so with *Greatest Adventures*. After failing to outrun that bloody boulder after ten attempts, I gave up and switched the damn thing off. I was tempted to sell the game, but two things stopped me: I knew I'd never recoup my money (my local importer didn't do refunds), and I reeeaaallly liked Indiana Jones.

Taking a deep breath, I switched the game back on, picked up my control pad, and played the boulder level. Something clicked, and I easily finished it, with space to spare. It felt tremendously satisfying to achieve, and it taught me that you should never give up on a game, unless of course it's a really bad one. Unfortunately for my favorite fictional archaeologist, there've been plenty of those. –Darran Lee Jones



Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Inindo: *The Way of the Ninja*

PUBLISHER: Koei.
DEVELOPER: Koei.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

As an Iga ninja, you must travel around feudal Japan (by foot and by boat), battling monsters (more than one hundred different types) and visiting towns, villages, training sites, caves, and dungeons (there are eighteen multi-level dungeon mazes). Victory in battles, which are random, turn-based, and viewed via third-person, grant you gold and experience points. After gaining a certain amount of experience, you'll advance to the next skill level, boosting your attack and defense strength. You begin the game outfitted with nothing but melee attacks, but training at dungeons lets you acquire special magic techniques. You will also use such weapons as a sword and throwing stars. During battles, you'll select from a list: attack, move, magic, defend, items, and flee.

Other activities in the game, which is set in 1582 (the warring states period), include spying, talking to villagers, resting and saving your progress at inns, buying and selling items (cures, charms, weapons, and the like), setting castles on fire to destroy enemies and their food supply, delegating commands to the soldiers in your unit, and recruiting characters (up to two at once) of different classes (ninja, sage, wizard, warrior) for your party so you can train, travel, and fight together. You guide your character on a world map, and in towns and dungeons. If you don't kill Oda Nobunaga (whose goal is to conquer and unify Japan) by the year 1601, the game will end. Based on the computer game of the same name, *Inindo: The Way of the Ninja* is part of the Nobunaga's Ambition series. Known as *Super Inindou: Datou Nobunaga* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"*Inindo* is one of the most unprofessional-looking and -sounding games I've ever played. I'd say that the overworld, dungeon, and town graphics look like something that belongs on the NES, except that I've seen NES RPGs that looked far better. One thing I do like about the graphics is the enemies. They are based on traditional Japanese monsters, like ogres, tengus, and strange spirits, so they look a lot different than the enemies in most any other RPG. They are also animated, and some even have a separate animation for attack and magic. The animation isn't spectacular, but animated enemies were such a rarity in RPGs back when *Inindo* was made that I can easily appreciate them. The music, which is a stilted attempt at sounding like traditional Japanese instruments, is sometimes passable (town and overworld themes), but often grating and obnoxious (dungeon and battle themes). You are likely to feel visually and aurally assaulted when you first play *Inindo*, but it is possible to get past it.

"I hope I'm not making *Inindo* sound worse than it actually is. There is a lot going for this game, otherwise I wouldn't have enjoyed it as much as I did the first time through. One thing that particularly impressed me about the game world, despite how unimpressive it looks, is how it seemed to have a life of its own. Recruitable characters often don't stay in the same towns where you meet them. They travel around, and sometimes you'll meet them, and even fight them, on the overworld. Character dialogue is written with a similar tongue-in-cheek humor to that of the Shadowgate series. Although the mandatory dungeons must be completed in a specific order, the world is nonlinear, and you can explore all of Japan's towns and optional dungeons at your leisure. Most bosses are optional, but you'll probably want to beat them anyway to gear up for tougher obstacles, and some of them are quite comical, like the great Tengu, Sagamibo. There are other little humorous bits, such as when your ninja attempts to sabotage a castle, but fails and falls off the side. I laughed quite a bit at that." –Flying Omelette (www.flyingomelette.com)

Scriffer Publishing, LLC

Inspector Gadget

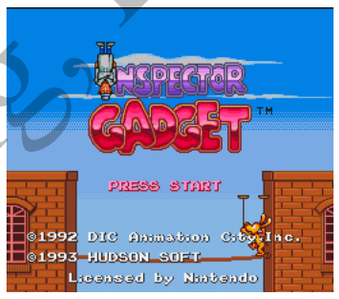
PUBLISHER: Hudson Soft.
DEVELOPER: AIM.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Based on the syndicated cartoon series (1983–1986), *Inspector Gadget* puts players in the familiar role of a clueless bionic policeman who can run, jump (after a slight delay), squat, punch, kick, and extend his arms and legs. And, of course, he uses gadgets, including arrows (a projectile weapon), lamps (to see in the dark, uncover secret passage ways, and throw as a weapon), bombs (for blasting open multiple blocks or destroying enemies), hands (for pulling himself up with hanging rings), blue propellers (for flying), red propellers (for attacking aerial enemies), and suction cups (for climbing walls). Hats, which are found hidden in blocks, power most of the items. Also hidden in blocks are coats, which restore Gadget's hit points after he has been reduced to wearing his boxer shorts (à la *Ghosts 'n Goblins*) by getting hit by an enemy or obstacle.

Enemies to battle include snowmen, robots, tribal natives, moths, scorpions, henchmen, and more. Levels, which include such elements as hills, spikes, trees, rolling boulders, icy platforms, moving platforms, and a ridable cart that moves on branching pathways, are timed, making for a formidable challenge. Each level is preceded by a short introduction at Gadget's house, based on the running gag in the series in which the inspector blows up Chief Quimby with a self-destructing message. The levels are based on locations from the cartoon, including Count Dracula's castle in England, Cuckoo Clock Maker's clock tower in Switzerland, Jungle Bob's jungle hideout in South America, King Tutonpoot's tomb in Egypt, and Dr. Claw's Winterland Castle. Each level boss is Dr. Claw himself, who battles Gadget in various ways, including as a Mech in the last level. The inspector's goal is to rescue his niece, Penny, from Dr. Claw.

Notable Quotable:

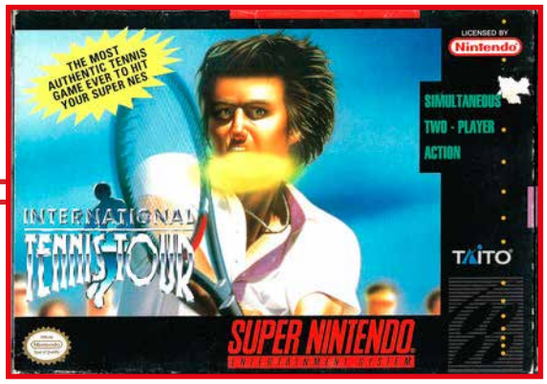
"Our beloved Inspector is rendered nicely in 16-bits. While it's not the most stunning example of the Super Nintendo's capabilities, it gets the job done, staying faithful to the look of the cartoon . . . The critical moves Inspector Gadget packs in the show are well-represented in video game form, just as you would expect from a topflight adaptation . . . Every enemy in this game cries the same 'Ow,' which sounds suspiciously like Inspector Gadget himself . . . The music is solid. While the show's opening theme is not present, the tracks set the game's tone well, combining the lighthearted goofiness of the title protagonist with a sleuth-like urgency . . . While making a fun action/platform game out of *Inspector Gadget* may have raised a few skeptical eyebrows, Hudson Soft delivers something that should satisfy both fans of the show and fans of platformers." –Nerd Bacon (nerdbacon.com)



Schiffer Publishing LTD

International Tennis Tour

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Loriciel.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Tennis, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.



Viewed from behind your side of the court (grass, clay, hard, or indoor), *International Tennis Tour* features five modes of play: Training (practice serving and volleying), Exhibition (where you can alter rules), Tournament (same as Exhibition, but multiple matches against different competitors), Nations Cup (a doubles competition), and Championship, which is a one-player competition against various computer opponents that takes approximately fifty-two in-game weeks. There are three difficulty levels: beginner, amateur, and professional. Players are generic, and there are no female characters, but the game looks good and has nice sound effects, including an animated, cheering crowd wearing brightly colored clothing.

Notable Quotable:

"This game is so slow. The frame rate is poor. The camera angle is too low, so your depth perception is wonky. The ball moves so slowly [compared] to how quickly your opponent can move that it's just about impossible to hit any winners. Just keep the ball in play and wait for your opponent to make a mistake. More than half the time the computer returns your serve with a cheap-ass drop-shot that just barely crosses the net, and it's impossible to return. I'd avoid this game." –SNES drunk (YouTube)

Insider Insight:

International Tennis Tour features no real players, no real locations—nothing to connect it to real tennis, except for the fact that it's fun as hell. I bought it when I was eleven, out of that natural impulse that I had to spend every single suffering dollar I had when I went to a video game store. It was fifteen bucks, and after I picked up a few games I really wanted, including *Super Street Fighter II*, I figured I'd take a shot. Ironically, *International Tennis Tour* ended up being one my favorite games.

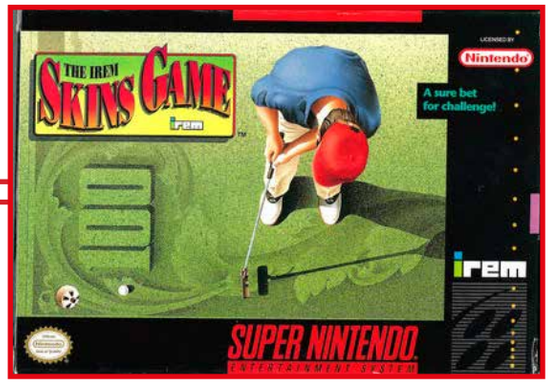
What *International Tennis Tour* did for me was more than virtually any video game I ever got on a whim. The game introduced me to tennis. With simple sprites and smooth gameplay, it was mega digestible. Like the NHL games and *Madden*, my father and I put it into steady rotation, and we'd have frenetic matches or even play as a team against the super-difficult CPU. The game also made my father and I want to watch tennis on TV and, more importantly, get off the couch and play it in real life. Crazy to think that a $15 game from the local video store created memories on the screen and out in the sun.

Nearly twenty-five years later, I still play tennis video games, but since there hasn't been a good one since the PlayStation 3/Xbox 360 era, I usually dust off the Super Nintendo and play it there. While *International Tennis Tour* doesn't have all the bells and whistles of the Tennis 2K series, my imagination, alongside the memories I have with the game, more than make up for its lack of graphical sexiness. Some day when she gets older, my infant daughter will enjoy virtual tennis as well as the real sport—just like me. –Patrick Hickey Jr.

Differ Publishing, LTD

The Irem Skins Game

PUBLISHER: Irem.
DEVELOPER: Irem.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Golf, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.



Play arcade-style golf on your SNES with *The Irem Skins Game*. Each hole has a cash prize of at least $10,000. The player who has hit the fewest strokes after completing a hole wins the money. In the case of a tie, the cash is carried over to the next hole. In addition, there are bonus rounds where players win money for hitting closest to the pin. Along with the Skins Game, the cartridge features Stroke Play, which tallies the total number of strokes over a course of a game; Match Play, which has two golfers competing to see who can win the most holes out of nine or eighteen holes; and Tournament mode, which involves playing either eighteen or thirty-six holes against computer opponents.

Gamers can select from four different golfers (three males and one female), each differing according to accuracy, drive, power, backspin, hook, and slice. You view your golfer from behind. After selecting your club, adjusting your stance, and determining the power of your shot, you press the button when the fast-moving arrow on the swing meter touches the target line. An overhead view of the hole is pictured to the right of your golfer, and a larger top-down view follows the ball after you hit it. When you reach the putting green, it is shown from overhead while your golfer is viewed from behind on the right. The game is ported from Irem's 1990 coin-op, *Major Title*. The arcade game called *The Irem Skins Game* is actually a port of the Japanese coin-op sequel, *Major Title 2: Tournament Leader*.

Notable Quotable:

"The animation of the golfer is not as good as the PGA series and nowhere near the quality of *Jack Nicklaus Golf*'s swing animation . . . the overhead view of the entire course is stunning . . . the tracks you hear . . . sound pretty good; the only downside to this is there are all of four songs in the game, and they get repetitive. The physics are brilliant and fair, yet still bring some challenge. Picking shots, direction, and tapping your swing timing is executed perfectly . . . apart from *Kirby's Dream Course*, this is the most exciting and entertaining golf game on the SNES."
–The Retroist (www.retroist.com)

Schiffer Publishing LTD

The Itchy & Scratchy Game

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Bits Corporation.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

One of the best things about *The Simpsons* is *The Itchy & Scratchy Show*, a satirical, hilarious, decidedly violent cartoon-within-a-cartoon inspired by *Tom and Jerry*. Unfortunately, this game doesn't fare so well, despite suitably cartoonish graphics and some humor. It's a fighting game of sorts played through seven themed, side-scrolling, platform-style levels: Juracid Bath, The Medieval Dead, Mutilation on the Bounty, The Pusseidon Adventure, The Magnificent Severed, A Site for Sawed Eyes, and Disassembly Line.

You control Itchy as he runs, jumps, and chases after Scratchy with a mallet while dodging his attacks. To defeat Scratchy, you must hit him numerous times. This can get annoying because he'll frequently run offscreen. Each level contains other weapons you can grab, such as an axe, a sword, a pirate gun, a bolt gun, and a boomerang. To defeat bosses, such as Scratchy driving a tractor and Scratchy riding a wooden horse, you throw projectiles. A two-player mode might have been fun, but we'll never know. Also produced for the Game Gear. A Genesis version was developed but not released.

Notable Quotable:
"Gameplay suffers from extensive repetition and poor control and, despite the large number of weapons included in the game, there are too few opportunities to pick them up. For true *Simpsons* fans, the Itchy and Scratchy level in *Bart's Nightmare* is still the best place to look for this duo." –*Game Players* (March 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"There's a reason *Itchy & Scratchy* cartoons rarely occupy more than thirty seconds of any *Simpsons* episode: stretch the concept to the full half hour, and the ratings would plummet. It's the same for video games. While Itchy and Scratchy appeared in a hilarious cameo on the Super NES cartridge *Bart's Nightmare*, here they duke it out in an interminable, multistage whackfest. As for *Simpsons*-style irony, despite a plethora of chainsaws, axes, and flamethrowers, *The Itchy & Scratchy Game* has been deemed appropriate for kids six and older by the ever-vigilant Software Ratings Board." –*Entertainment Weekly* (May 1995)

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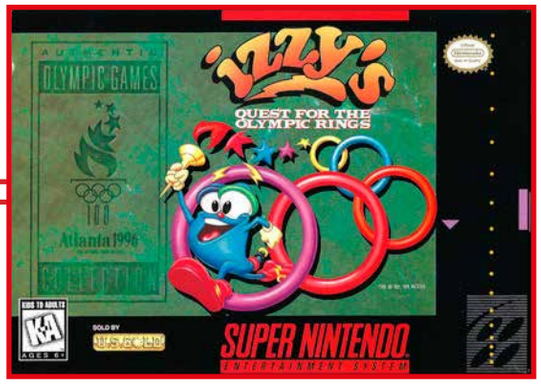
Izzy's Quest for the Olympic Rings

PUBLISHER: U.S. Gold.
DEVELOPER: Alexandria.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1996.



Starring the official mascot of the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, *Izzy's Quest* has players guiding a little blue creature through ten levels of Torch World (including grassy hills with Greek buildings, a lava world, and outer space), searching for the five Olympic rings. The rich, colorful backgrounds are striking with their preponderance of purples, blues, pinks, and greens. The game plays like a sluggish *Sonic the Hedgehog* as Izzy runs and jumps on platforms and spin-jumps to defeat enemies (long jumps leave Izzy vulnerable to getting hurt if he lands on an enemy). He can also climb ropes and vines. More original is the fact that Izzy can grab morph stars to transform into eight different characters: a glider, a javelin, a fencer, a baseball player, an archer, a skateboarder, a rocket, and a hammer.

Izzy can also grab power-ups, including rocket fuel, javelin boosts, gold stars (continues), protecto bubbles (which only last ten seconds), extra lives, and lightning (smart bombs). To score points and repair damage to himself, he can collect gold, silver, and bronze medallions. *Izzy's Quest* features two types of bonus stages: a vertical-scrolling platformer and a vertical vehicle racer/shooter. The action experiences slowdown when the title character jumps, which is kind of odd, but this is a playable platformer that fans of the genre will appreciate. Also released for the Genesis.

Fun Fact:
Izzy also appeared in an obscure educational adventure game for the PC called *Izzy's Adventure* (1996).

Notable Quotable:
"The graphics are very colorful and look better than expected from basically an ad for the Olympics turned into a game. All of the characters are filled with quirky personality, and some might make you smirk. Unfortunately, the game features slowdown . . . It really affects the game, and is the one huge fault. The sound has some catchy music and very weird grunts and noises for all of the characters. It can take you a while to finish . . . and there's a high-score board thrown in for replayability. Overall, *Izzy's Quest for the Olympic Rings* is much better than you'd think. It's cute and silly, but addicting, too . . . definitely worth a look." –GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)

Schiffer Publishing TM

Jack Nicklaus Golf

PUBLISHER: Tradewest.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Golf, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

Endorsed by The Golden Bear himself, this mediocre golf sim features two eighteen-hole golf courses (Muirfield Village and The Bear's Track), plus you can design an unlimited number of your own. Up to four players compete on beginner and expert levels. You can also practice putts and specific holes, and get in some swings on a driving range. A two-click control technique lets you adjust the power and accuracy of each swing, and a static, digitized Nicklaus offers tips via text. Each time you prepare to hit the ball, the screen goes black, and the game has to render the playfield and the trees, which takes several seconds and is annoying. In addition, the graphics are flat. There's no in-game music (the menu screen music is quite good, though), but this is golf, after all, a traditionally quiet sport. Also released for the Game Boy.

Fun Fact:
A legend who won eighteen major championships (seventy-three victories total), Nicklaus endorsed a number of other golf video games, including *Jack Nicklaus' Greatest 18 Holes of Major Championship Golf* (NES), *Jack Nicklaus' Power Challenge Golf* (Genesis), and *Jack Nicklaus' Turbo Golf* (TurboGrafx-16).

Notable Quotable:
"At first glance, *JNG* doesn't look that bad. The intro screen looks pretty good by 16-bit standards, there's some punchy menu screen music, and even a bit of customization (in that you can choose your name, and three, count 'em, three club colors). There are two courses to choose from, and each round has some nominal variety in wind and weather conditions. So far, so good—and then you actually start playing the game, and everything falls apart. Right away, you're liable to notice the graphics, and how the game processes them. Though the in-game visuals are mediocre at best, and well below the SNES's high-end capabilities, they're rendered at an absolute snail's pace . . . The gameplay is standard for most golf games . . . The problem is, there's no sense of depth or scale, which makes it almost impossible to judge the distance to the hole . . . The whole experience just feels so dead and hollow, and that's not helped by the near total lack of in-game sound, which is largely reduced to a monotonous thud of club hitting ball . . . Despite the various game modes, there's only one way to have any fun with a copy of *Jack Nicklaus Golf*, and that's to use a nine iron to bash the damned thing to pieces." –Karsten Writes Stuff (karstenwritesstuff.wordpress.com)

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

James Bond Jr.

PUBLISHER: THQ.
DEVELOPER: Gray Matter.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

Loosely adapted from the cartoon, which ran for one season from 1991 to 1992, *James Bond Jr.* pits James Bond's nephew against Dr. Derange, Skullcap, Maximillion Cortex, and their evil leader, S.C.U.M. Lord. The game has seven levels: The Chase is On!, Flight to the Temple, The Temple of Gold, The Canals of Venice, The Sewers of Venice, Flight to S.C.U.M. HQ, and Assault on S.C.U.M. HQ. The boy hero you control runs, jumps (hold down button to jump higher), ducks (under enemy projectiles), climbs ladders, punches, kicks (including flying kicks), and rolls right and left. And, because any Bond worth the name needs his gadgets, he can add a number of helpful items to his arsenal, including grenades, darts, shields, super jump sneakers, missiles, a gas mask, a laser cannon, rocket shoes (for flight), and a thermal jacket (for protection against icicles).

Bond Jr. can also commandeer a mini-copter, a speedboat, and a jet, each offering side-scrolling shooter action. In addition to henchmen, Bond Jr. battles such commonplace enemies as snakes and bats, and he must avoid typical obstacles like spikes and dripping acid. The game is playable, but not much more—cheap hits, clunky controls, and poor, unimaginative level design make it below average. Much different than the bland-looking NES game of the same name, which has puzzles and more complex mission objectives.

Insider Insight:
Having been talked out of getting *Star Fox* for my birthday in 1993, by pretty much everyone because they saw me reach the credits within a rental or two, I still wanted to get an SNES game and was determined to do so with my birthday money. The game I settled on was *Final Fight*. It eluded me, however, so I ended up spending most of the money I had on *Jurassic Park* and *Super Mario Bros.* (the movie) toys. Still wanting a game but no longer being in possession of the necessary funds, I threw a tantrum in a mall until my mom agreed to pay the difference in whatever game I picked out. I narrowed it down to two: *Battletoads in Battlemaniacs* and *James Bond Jr.*, the latter of which was a game I had previously gotten in trouble with after my parents had read a journal entry in which I expressed displeasure with them because they wouldn't let me rent an SNES console in order to play it.

I'm not sure why I picked *James Bond Jr.* or why I wanted to play it so bad, because I never saw a single episode of the cartoon (though I did own the toys). Other than the reaction of punching people in the face accompanied by a hilarious sound effect, the game itself is about what you would expect from a licensed THQ SNES game. It's part 2D side-scroller mixed with 2D shooter-style vehicle segments with a deceptively easy intro stage: three jumps, one bad guy, and it literally takes second to finish. This is followed by a very tricky, one-hit death vehicle stage where you pilot a helicopter, and anything but pixel-perfect precision will get you killed. –Blair Farrell

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Jammit

PUBLISHER: GTE Interactive Media.
DEVELOPER: GTE Vantage
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Produced by the makers of *Street Hockey '95*, *Jammit* is a side-view, one-on-one game of street basketball that wears its attitude on its proverbial sleeve. After selecting one of three trash-talking players—Slade (a dude with a mustache), Roxy (a blonde female), or Chill (an African-American male)—and placing a bet on the game (you begin with $300), you will hit the court, hoping to survive eight rounds in order to play Judge, the so-called "Court King," at his home court, The Palace. Trash talk is achieved via digitized voice effects (which are hard to discern, unfortunately), and the player graphics were produced, at least in part, through the use of digitized actors. Slam dunks are shown in close-up.

A number of variations give the game variety as you can play with trash talk turned on or off, fouls enforced or not enforced, and slam dunks only. There are also modes where both players have a basketball, and where only shots made from one of two moving "X"s on the court count. Most games are to twenty-one, and some have "poison" rules where if you score twenty your point total is reduced to thirteen. There's also a Bass Boost option where players can "turn on the bass back beat for the most happenin' music effects," as described by the manual. Despite the myriad options, most people view *Jammit* as a (very) poor man's *NBA Jam*. Also released for the Genesis and 3DO.

Notable Quotable:

"*Jammit* is awful. The characters move like they're in *Pit-Fighter*, and shooting is so, so awkward. Avoid this game. It's probably one of the worst on the system." –SNES drunk (YouTube)

Memories:

My favorite basketball video games are *Double Dribble*, *NBA Jam*, and *NBA Street*, each decidedly arcade-style in nature. I also enjoyed some of the old "One-on-One" games featuring such NBA superstars as Julius Erving, Larry Bird, and Michael Jordan. *Jammit* is interesting, but not really my jam. I love the real sport of basketball—I played it in high school and still go to the park for street ball today.

Schiffer Publishing Ltd.

Jeopardy!

PUBLISHER: GameTek.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering Inc.
GAME TYPE: Game Show, 1–3 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

Hosted by Alex Trebek himself (via digitized voice and imagery), *Jeopardy!* for the Super NES recreates the popular TV gameshow quite well (theme music and the television studio are also digitized). As play begins, three contestants are shown standing behind podiums (the computer fills in if only one or two humans are playing), and then the view switches to a board showing six different categories. Each category is at the top of a column, with each column containing a series of progressively higher dollar amounts. After a category and dollar amount has been selected, a trivia question is posed, and within a set time limit players must answer the question by guiding a cursor along an alphabet to spell out the word or words. This can get tedious, but what other choice did the programmers have? There are more than 3,500 questions spread over 700+ categories. Jeopardy!, Double Jeopardy! and Final Jeopardy! are included. The *Jeopardy!* TV show, which Merv Griffin created in 1964, was also adapted for the NES, Genesis, Sega CD, PlayStation, and numerous other systems.

Notable Quotable:

"The action is very slow . . . inputting answers takes ages and quickly becomes boring . . . okay for an afternoon's entertainment . . . sketchy graphics . . . The badly animated quizmaster quickly becomes annoying, and the contestants look like the cast of *Bay Watch*—they're very quick on the button, though, so you better have your thinking head on. The theme music is a typical quiz show tune—dreadful!" –*N-Force* (May 1993)

Insider Insight:
If you've ever been to a retro gaming convention, chances are that when you're looking for those pristine copies of *Super Mario World*, *Donkey Kong Country*, and *Star Fox*, you have to rummage through several copies of *Jeopardy!* first.

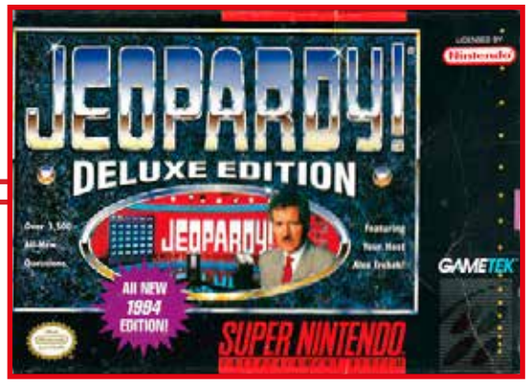
Yes, *Jeopardy!* for the Super Nintendo isn't exactly a desired cartridge, nor is it really that good of a game. The questions (or should I say answers) are outdated, Alex Trebek utters the same three-word response after every clue selection ("The answer is . . . "), and it gets tedious having to answer the questions by hovering over each letter. Even with all of this, however, I still love it. The '90s clothing, the 16-bit *Jeopardy!* theme, and even the outdated questions I don't know the answers to are all endearing. For my twenty-one-year-old self, it's like stepping into a world that is long gone.

In a more general sense, *Jeopardy!* the TV show has really helped me. I'm naturally competitive, so after watching a few episodes and getting addicted to it a couple of years back, I started studying geography, history, and science a lot more in order to answer a greater number of questions correctly. This has helped my grades quite a bit in college, and in the fall of 2016, I even passed the *Jeopardy!* online test and made it to the college auditions in New Orleans. I ultimately got cut from being cast, but it was a great experience. So when I'm at game conventions, searching through the different titles there, I can't help but smile when I see my favorite game show among the greats. –Ryan Weiss

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Jeopardy! Deluxe Edition

PUBLISHER: GameTek.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering Inc.
GAME TYPE: Game Show, 1–3 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.



Jeopardy! Deluxe Edition is similar to *Jeopardy!*, but with more than 3,500 all-new questions in more than 700 categories (art, literature, sports, fine china, architecture, dogs, royalty, and the like). Gamers can play as one of five different characters: two female and three male, each with barely animated facial expressions. Once again, digitization was used to nice effect, with a photorealistic (relatively speaking) image of host Alex Trebek spouting such phrases as "You are correct" and "Here are the categories." Players are given one minute to enter their answers via the control pad (one letter at a time), and non-gamers may find this a bit intimidating (or at least tedious). Overall, despite a less-than-ideal control setup, this is a playable version of the popular gameshow. Also released for the Genesis.

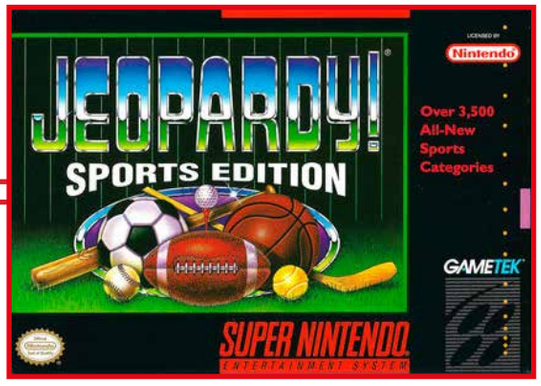
Notable Quotable:

"The answer is: Yet another exercise in poorly paced, low production value, 16-bit gameshow translation. Oh, oh, I know—'What is *Jeopardy! Deluxe Edition* for the Super Nintendo?' Yes, that's correct, and you win this pixelated screenshot and crunchy soundbite of Alex Trebek . . . The questions in the home version are definitely easier than the real deal . . . It's a solid and straightforward digital quiz . . . This is a functional version of *Jeopardy!*". –CGRundertow (YouTube)

Schiffer Publishing

Jeopardy! Sports Edition

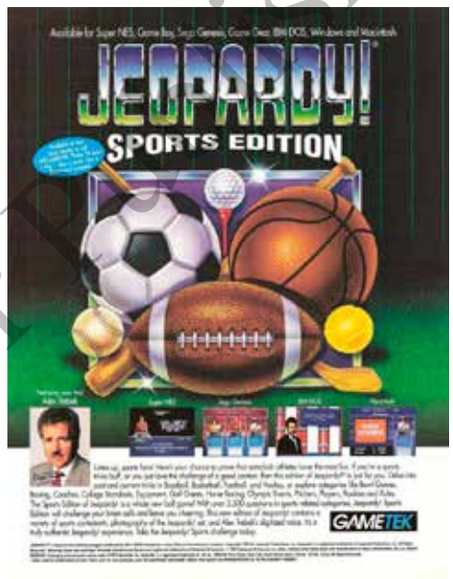
PUBLISHER: GameTek.
DEVELOPER: Imagineering Inc.
GAME TYPE: Game Show, 1–3 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



Jeopardy! Sports Edition is similar to *Jeopardy!* and *Jeopardy! Deluxe Edition*, but this time the 3,500 all-new questions are, as the title suggests, related to the wide world of sports. There are 700 categories, including such brain bogglers as "1992 Olympics," "Baseball Firsts," "Basketball History," "Bowling," "College Coaches," "Football Numbers," "Golf Greats," and "Martial Arts." Like the other versions of Jeopardy! for the SNES, this one is fun, but entering the answers letter by letter is cumbersome, and it gets old waiting for the computer to take its turn. Also, like the other versions, the sim could use more questions. At around 3,500 puzzlers each, the various Jeopardy! games lag behind *Wheel of Fortune* for the Super Nintendo by about 1,000. Although not featured on the front cover, a digitized Alex Trebek is on hand to host the proceedings. Amusingly and fittingly, each of the contestants is outfitted in sports garb. Also released for the Genesis, Game Boy, and Game Gear.

Notable Quotable:
"Pretty tough, even if you're a sports trivia god. The characters you choose from are funny-looking. The computer opponents are not too swift: it seems like you can always ring in before them." –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (July 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"The SNES offering is an almost exact replica of the Genesis game, down to the same categories and questions. A slow-moving cursor lengthens the time it takes to enter an answer—the only obvious difference between the two." –*Game Players* (August 1994)



Insider Insight:
You remember those autograph books you got when you graduated elementary school? The ones everyone wrote something in? Things like, "Have fun in junior high," or some other random kind-hearted wish? Well, every eleven-year-old girl wrote me something like, "Have fun in JHS, stop talking about sports," or, "You were nice, but you talk about sports too much." For me, reading sports almanacs was like sniffing coke for Tony Montana in *Scarface*. I used to literally scare my father when I'd remember stats from players that were on the field before I was born.

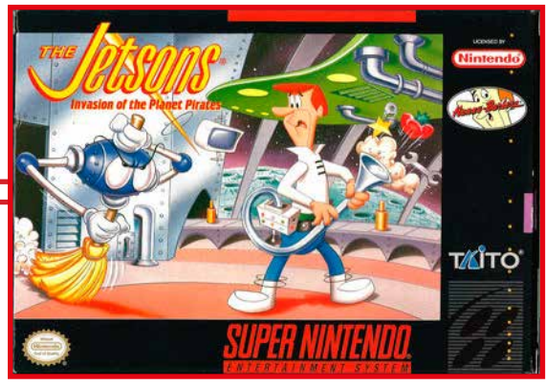
As a result, I naturally gravitated toward *Jeopardy! Sports Edition*. My other love as a kid, besides sports and video games, was spelling, so being able to answer the questions and spell them correctly made the game an even more fun and challenging experience. Answering who was the 1967 American League MVP [Carl Yastrzemski] was easy for me, but spelling it correctly in fifth grade so I could score the points was the real challenge.

My favorite part of the game, though, was destroying my dad. The few times we rented it were memorable because I proved to the smartest person in my world that I was essentially his own version of Dustin Hoffman in *Rain Man*. Even today, when my dad and I talk sports, he knows he's on eggshells because I will correct him—I know the stats, I know the history. *Jeopardy! Sports Edition* is partially responsible for that. –Patrick Hickey Jr.

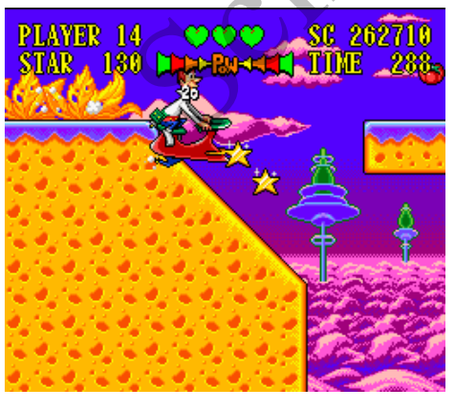
Schiffer Publishing, LTD

The Jetsons: *Invasion of the Planet Pirates*

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Sting Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.



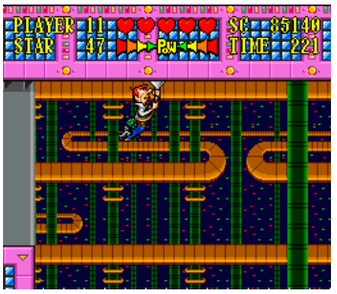
Based on Hanna-Barbera's classic sci-fi animated sitcom, which ran from 1962 to 1963, and from 1985 to 1987, *The Jetsons: Invasion of the Planet Pirates* has you guiding George Jetson as he walks, runs, and jumps through nine cute, colorful, cartoonish, nicely animated stages, including such locales as space factories, underwater, and exotic planets. You must rid the world of pirates and thwart their invasion, armed only with a vacuum-like weapon called the Pneumo-Osmatic-Precipitator (P.O.P.) given to George by Captain Zoom. This cool device lets you suck up blocks and throw them at enemies (including robots), breathe underwater, stick to ceilings and walls to reach otherwise inaccessible areas, and grab up such objects as food for points (high scores let you play bonus games) and hearts for health (even when the items are across the screen from you).



George also flips switches and rides pneumatic tubes, and much of the platforming and puzzle-solving action relies on the P.O.P., which is clearly what sets *The Jetsons* apart from similar platformers. The lively musical score includes the opening theme for the show. Despite uneven difficulty and controls that take some getting used to, this is a solid game. The futuristic cartoon family starred in a number of other video games as well, including *The Jetsons' Ways With Words* (Intellivision computer module), *The Jetsons: Cogswell's Caper!* (NES), and *The Jetsons: Robot Panic* (Game Boy).

Fun Fact:
In 1995, Sting Entertainment reprogrammed and edited *The Jetsons: Invasion of the Planet Pirates* for the Japanese market, turning it into a new game called *Yōkai Buster: Ruka no Daibōken* (*Phantom Buster: Ruka's Big Adventure*). It is based on the *Yōkai Buster Ruka* manga, with players controlling a demon girl who lives in a world terrorized by monsters.

Notable Quotable:
"The presentation of this game isn't particularly remarkable. Certain things animate relatively well, such as George's walking and running animations as well as streams of flowing water that run across the ground. I also like the attention to detail displayed during rare instances, such as riding through a patch of thick grass to emerge on the other end covered in tropical fruits and leaves. Still, the game doesn't look particularly great as a whole . . . The game has a relatively good soundtrack, though some of the themes I've come to like that were constantly echoed throughout *The Jetsons* TV show are truncated, annoying imitations of the genuine tunes and loop far too much . . . In this regard, I'd have to say that



Hideki Takahagi (responsible for the music in this game) let me down a little . . . At least the sound effects aren't annoying, and George Jetson sounds like George Jetson when he's hit. Some more notable issues are that the levels are deviously designed and can throw in some cheap shots. I also dislike a few of the unexpected events with a passion, such as a rising segment on the second level that becomes a pit-hole without a moment's notice, or walking down a corridor only to get sucked into outer space. With a little work, this game is a breeze to finish, sans the semi-nasty final level. This is an okay game that's short but sweet for fans of the old *Jetsons* cartoons." –Gaming Sanctuary (www.gamingsanctuary.com)

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Jim Power: *The Lost Dimension in 3D*

PUBLISHER: Electro Brain.
DEVELOPER: Loriciel.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

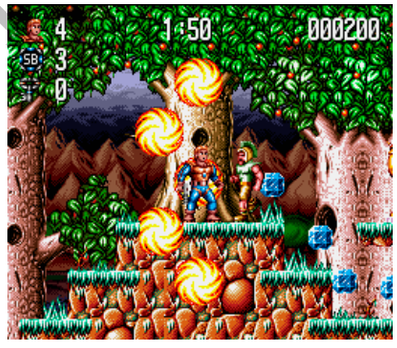
Produced using NUOPTIX 3D, a technique that enhances the game's graphics when 3D glasses are worn by the player, this game puts you in the role of Special Agent Jim Power. It's your job to send an evil being by the name of Vaprak back to the Lost Dimension. To help you on this quest, you are equipped with a blaster, a jet pack, a uni-jet, a gyro-cycle and an energy suit that is equipped with smart bombs. You can pick up extra lives, extra time, weapon power-ups, and keys (which are used for unlocking gates and doors).

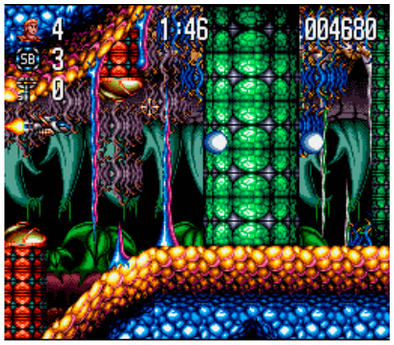
Much of the game is a side-scrolling platform shooter similar to *Contra*, but when you are flying in a ship, the game evokes the side-scrolling shooter action of *Gradius*. There are also top-down areas (Guardian's Castle and Time Tower) similar to stages two and five of *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, complete with Mode 7 graphics. Each level has you blasting numerous unnamed alien creatures as you maneuver from point A to point B. Boasting terrific production values, *Jim Power: The Lost Dimension in 3D* looks and sounds great, but it is notoriously difficult. Despite the title, it has 2D graphics (or faux 3D, to put it another way), but parallax scrolling gives it visual depth. 3D glasses were originally enclosed in the packaging, but you can play the game without them.

Insider Insight:
This game is hard—infuriatingly hard. Seriously, if you are up to a challenge, just try playing *Jim Power*. I say try, because odds are you won't clear the first few levels. I know that I never did. The programmer must have hated the world. Everything and anything moving (or not) kills you in this game—even a drop of water is toxic to the touch.

Still, the game is bright and beautiful to view. The parallax scrolling is a true sight to behold, and the included 3D glasses make it all pop just right. The game is fast and furious, tightly programmed, and the soundtrack is as catchy as a MIDI tune can get. Highly recommended . . . that is, if you have the power of patience. –Michael Thomasson

Notable Quotable:
"I didn't think a 3D video game was possible, but the effect in this cart actually works! It's a neat feature, but you get a headache after a while. Besides, the colorful graphics and music are fine without it. The character moves fairly well, but frustration kicks in when enemies come out of nowhere so fast that there's nothing you can do but take a mandatory hit. It's already a tough game. Why make it close to impossible?" –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1994)





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Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour

PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft.
DEVELOPER: Blue Byte Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Tennis, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

An upgrade from *Jimmy Connors Tennis* for the NES, *Pro Tennis Tour* adds a number of features to the formula, including doubles action, the option for full or easy control (in the latter mode, the computer controls movement, while the player handles shots), more character designs, and three new types of courts: indoor, desert, and Antarctic (which are in addition to hard, clay, and grass). There are also five professional coaches to help train you with your shots: lob, volley, forehand, backhand, net, and serve. In Tournament mode, gamers play as Jimmy Connors, but Exhibition lets players select from fifteen different fictional players (in addition to Connors). There are three difficulty levels: amateur, intermediate, and professional. The crowd, which you can't really see, claps during games, and calls like "out" and "30-love" are indicated via voice effects (as well as text). The elevated view is from behind your player, and the screen scrolls a little to show the entire court and the line judges.

Fun Fact:
Jimmy Connors was the top-ranked male tennis player for 268 weeks, including 160 consecutive weeks from July 29, 1974, to Aug. 22, 1977. He holds three prominent Open Era men's singles records: 109 titles, 1256 match wins, and 1535 matches played.

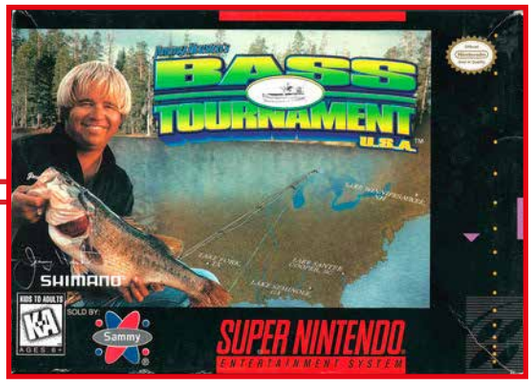
Notable Quotable:
"Controlling manually is kind of a disaster. To serve, you have to hold the swing button down while moving your target around. It moves so quickly that it can be tough to get the hang of. Just keeping the ball in play is a challenge . . . better than most athlete-licensed games, but your mileage may vary here. It depends on if the computer control bothers you or not. It kind of bothered me because I don't need it in other games, so I shouldn't need my hand held here, either. It almost feels like an apology for bad controls." –SNES drunk (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"The success of video tennis ultimately hangs upon the controls. Here they're dealt with imaginatively and sensibly, with a wide range of shots at every player's disposal. That said, however, I'm still not 100% happy with the control system. While the game is hugely enjoyable and provides a real challenge, the ball movement occasionally verges on the erratic and unrealistic—it either floats around the screen like a balloon or bounces too fast like a ping pong ball. *David Crane's Amazing Tennis* may have lacked depth compared to this game, but you can't deny the ball movement there was spot on . . . you can't always say the same about *Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour*." –*Super Play* (March, 1993)

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Jimmy Houston's Bass Tournament U.S.A.

PUBLISHER: American Sammy.
DEVELOPER: Nexus Interact.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Fishing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.



Go fishing with and receive advice from professional Bass Master Jimmy Houston on your SNES. You can Practice or enter Tournament mode, which lets you select from four different U.S. lakes: Lake Fork (Texas), Lake Winnipesauke (New Hampshire), Lake Seminole (Georgia), and Santee Cooper (South Carolina). Each lake has multiple spots on which to fish, for a total of thirty-three. You travel to each spot via boat with a top-down view of the action. While fishing, you view the game from behind the vest-wearing fisherman. A small window on the left side of the screen shows him reeling in his line (a meter gauges how strong the line will be cast). The screen also has readouts for depth, distance, time, wind direction, and speed. You can select from forty-one different lures (each in eight colors), six types of weather conditions, three line weights, seven Shimano rods, and two Shimano reels, along with what month you want to fish in. To proceed to the next stage of a tournament, you must rank at least third during the weigh-in, where the bass you have caught will be tallied up. Known as *Jissen Bass Fishing Hisshō-hō in USA* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"This is a fishing RPG. You can tell this is an RPG by the amount of grinding required to achieve the goal. If you're lucky, you'll catch a fish on every twentieth cast. If you're luckier, that fish will weigh over a pound. But it's a fun sort of grinding. The line physics are amazing. You can pull your rod all over the place . . . and the line actually curls and turns sensibly. If you cast your line into the weeds, it gets stuck there. I think that's pretty cool . . . I could see how this game could be addictive." –Every Game…Ever (everygame.wordpress.com)

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Joe & Mac

PUBLISHER: Data East.
DEVELOPER: Data East.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

Neanderthal nerds have crashed Joe and Mac's prehistoric village and scared off all the "cave babes." As Joe, who can walk, jump (including high jumps), squat, dash, and do somersaults, players must right this wrong by journeying through fifteen levels of old-school action, fending off such enemies as tyrannosauruses, pterodactyls, and rolling and rock-throwing Neanderthals. You begin the game armed with a club, but you can upgrade to bones (for hurling), boomerangs, fireballs, and stone wheels. Other pickups include 1-UPs, keys (only found in hidden stages, they open evil gates that block your path on the map), and three types of energy-replenishing food: small drumsticks, medium drumsticks, and large steaks. A second player can join in as Mac for competing or cooperating.

In the Genesis game, the cave babes have been captured instead of just scared off. Also, Joe begins with a projectile axe while Mac begins with a bone, and they can find throwable flint. The SNES game lets you cycle through weapons, while the Genesis game makes you drop your current weapon when you grab another. On the other hand, you can charge up your weapon in the Genesis game. The SNES version uses an overworld map, while the Genesis cart features in-game branching paths. There's more platforming in the SNES game—if you jump on an enemy it acts as a platform whereas jumping on enemies in the Genesis version kills them. The Genesis game is more faithful to the arcade original (Data East released the coin-op version, which was called *Caveman Ninja*, in 1991), and it has more animations, but the SNES version is more colorful. Both look great, have huge bosses, and are entertaining. The NES and Game Boy carts lack two-player action. Followed by *Congo's Caper*.

Insider Insight:

I've been a gamer all my life, and I already owned such pricey titles as *Mega Man X3* and *Chrono Trigger* when I began collecting retro video games in February of 2012. Since there weren't any local game stores I could search, and since the flea markets were way too cold to go to at the time, I resorted to buying games on eBay, a habit that I've continued. Later that year, in October, I purchased *Joe & Mac*, as I found it for a good price on eBay, and it was a game from my childhood that I had never owned but always played at my friend's house. I vividly remembered the colorful graphics and fun gameplay, and I knew I had to have it. Sadly, two days after I bought the game, my little shore town in New Jersey was ripped apart by Hurricane Sandy. This was one of the scariest times of my life.

I was terrified, but I was one of the lucky ones as I lived close to the mainland and on a hill, so there was no structural damage to my house. Certain other people I knew weren't so lucky, such as one of my co-workers, who couldn't go to work because a boat had crashed into his home. My town had no power for four days, and it was very cold. Our cell phones died around day two. Day four is when the game cartridge arrived in the mail, and the power was finally turned back on. I was so relieved that the power was back that the first thing I did was play a little *Joe & Mac*. It felt good to finally get everything back together and return to a sense of normalcy; I'll always remember that *Joe & Mac* played a helpful role during that difficult time. –Raymond Fix

Sniffer Publishing, LTD

Joe & Mac 2:
Lost in the Tropics

PUBLISHER: Data East.
DEVELOPER: Data East.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

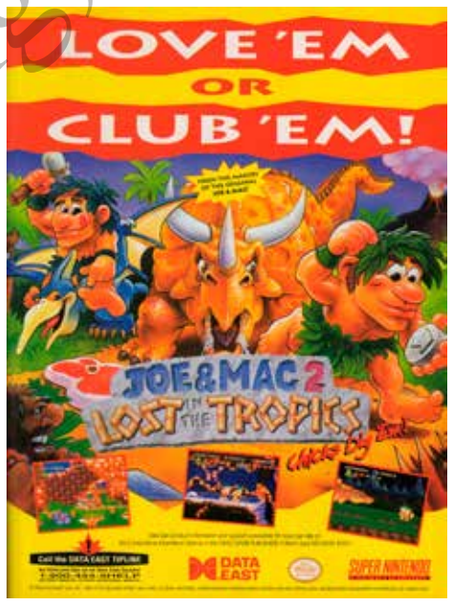
This SNES exclusive is the second console sequel (after *Congo's Caper*) to *Joe & Mac*. Caveman Gork has stolen the Chief of Kali Village's crown, and you, as Joe, must retrieve it by walking, dashing, climbing (vines), and battling your way through eighteen levels of play, including a tiki village, swamplands, snowy mountains, volcanic wastelands, verdant jungles, windy valleys, and, of course, the tropics. Joe will also ride a stone cart and certain dinosaurs. For thrashing the enemy cavemen and dinosaurs, Joe begins with a short-range club, but he can upgrade to a hammer and a spiked club that can unleash projectile waves. In addition, eating items gives Joe temporary projectiles, such as breathing fire (hot peppers), shooting bones (meat), and spitting seeds (fruit). An overhead island map lets you select stages, and between areas you can use money you've collected to purchase health. A second gamer can join in as Mac, competitively or cooperatively. This is another good-looking and -sounding, solidly playing game in the Joe & Mac franchise. Known in Europe as *Joe & Mac 3*. Released the same year as *Joe & Mac Returns* (arcade).

Notable Quotable:

"There's not much to think about in this easy-going game. Just bop everything in sight, admire the scenery, and have fun. It's a blast in the past!" –*GamePro* (May 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Wow! I was completely taken by surprise with this one . . . *Joe & Mac 2* proves that blending action and role-playing can make a great game. The graphics are absolutely stunning and the jungle tunes have a great beat. The levels are long and have interesting surprises, but they can also be rather bland in the action department. Overall, *Joe & Mac 2* is a definite hit." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1994)



Archfiler Publishing, LLC

John Madden Football

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: Park Place Production Team.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1991.

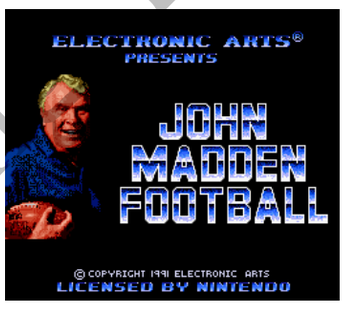
The first game in the series for the Super NES, *John Madden Football* is the equivalent of *John Madden Football '92* for the Genesis, but with better graphics and sounds. Unfortunately, the game suffers from excessive slowdown, sluggish gameplay, and choppy animation, making it a huge disappointment for owners of the system (if you've only played this game in the franchise, you may wonder what all the Madden fuss is about). Modes of play include Pre-Season, Regular Season, Playoffs, and Sudden Death. There's an All-Madden Team, plus twenty-eight teams based on their real-life NFL counterparts from the 1990 season (lack of NFL or NFLPA licensing prevents the use of player names, team names, and logos). Other features include penalties, timeouts, turnovers, adjustable weather conditions, instant replays, and more than one hundred offensive and defensive plays. Plus, you can "Ask Madden" for help in determining which play to call. An unusual passing view employs a row of three windows at the top of the screen that zoom in on the receivers.

Fun Fact:
The Madden series debuted in 1988 with *John Madden Football* for home computers. From the beginning, Madden, who was recruited to video games by EA founder Trip Hawkins, insisted on realism, including eleven on-field players for each team. Madden won a Super Bowl as head coach of the Oakland Raiders in 1977. After retiring from coaching, Madden became a colorful and popular NFL analyst, commentating on games for thirty years beginning in 1979.

Notable Quotable:
"This isn't just something I put my name to . . . I've been in the development of this game from day one . . . At one time it was just two guys, and I was one of them . . . One of my goals was to make the video game look like television." –John Madden, speaking about the Madden series at EA Sports' 20th anniversary celebration of the franchise.

Notable Quotable:
"This game makes very good use of the special 16-bit facilities of the Super NES, including Mode 7 graphics for rotation and scaling. In fact, it improves upon the 16-bit features of the personal computer and Sega Genesis versions . . . We spent a Sunday afternoon playing this game and never saw the same play twice . . . We worked from an early American preproduction version of the game." –*Ultimate Unauthorized Super Nintendo Game Strategies* (1991, Bantam Books)

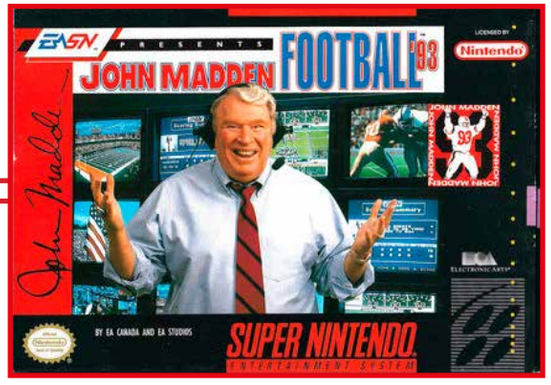
Notable Quotable:
"The game's shoddy visual presentation certainly doesn't elevate the gameplay department. While it may have seemed sensible a quarter-century ago, in retrospect the programmers made a poor choice when designing the passing game. I am referring to the notorious pass boxes. Once the quarterback has snapped the ball by pressing 'B,' his user must press 'B' again to view his three pass options. Along with covering up valuable visual real estate, these abominations aren't even an accurate representation of whether the player is open for a pass or not. Adding insult to injury, it is very difficult to make catches once the ball is thrown, even if by chance the receiver is legitimately open, due to avatar slippage." –SNES Hub (playingwithsuperpower.com)



Schiffer Publishing LTD

John Madden Football '93

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: Electronic Arts.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.



The second Madden title for the SNES, *John Madden Football '93* updates the series with player taunting, expanded team stats, the ability to overturn close calls, a no-huddle offense, a split play-calling screen, an animated coin toss, a stop-clock play, and the ability to shift defensive players. The game includes twenty-eight teams (reflecting the 1992-'93 NFL season), two All-Madden teams, and eight greatest-ever teams. Unlike the superior Genesis version, the SNES game does not include battery backup or digitized commentary by Madden. Followed by *Madden NFL '94* (SNES, Genesis).

Notable Quotable:

"Although its crisp visuals and clear music easily surpass those of Genesis *Madden '93*, this SNES edition lacks that all-important 'fun factor.' I remember my friend Eric buying this game back in the day and bragging about how great it looked. After playing my Genesis version, however, he *returned* his copy . . . the animation is pretty bad compared to the Genesis game, but it's a hell of a lot better than SNES *John Madden Football*. Before each game you're presented with a nice, wide shot of the stadium . . . user interface has been cleaned up considerably. The play selection menu looks very sharp, and there's an audible beep when you choose a play. The action on the field is fairly easy to follow, but despite what the box contends, the animation is pretty slow . . . I find it amusing how receivers catch passes in this game with their *backs* to the ball. When someone makes an interception, the screen gets blurry . . . After a big play, a digitized group of fans is displayed. These guys are unintentionally hilarious. Also amusing is the referee calls a field goal 'good' *well before* it actually passes through the uprights." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:

Nineteen-ninety-five was a rough year for my family. My dad lost his job, and times were hard. While I didn't quite realize it then, we were poor. So poor that when I asked for *Madden NFL 96* for Christmas that year, I received *John Madden Football '93* instead. I'll never forget seeing the wrapped game under the tree. I knew it was a game—I just didn't know which one. I grew up a lot when I opened it. I saw the look on my parents' faces. They did their best. They hoped I was going to be happy. In a flash I pushed my sadness deep down and gave them a big smile and hug. I had *them*—I didn't need the newest football simulation from EA Sports. I just needed my folks.

Luckily, *John Madden Football '93* was an awesome game. It wasn't as sexy as the '96 version, but it played well, and I killed hours of my childhood on it. While conducting interviews for my book, *The Minds Behind the Games: Interviews With Cult and Classic Game Developers*, I spoke with one of the game's creators, Michael Brook, who told me that even though there were no real players in the game, there were real player numbers and ratings. This meant that all the players knew they were in the game. They were thrilled, and they cared about their ratings, so much so that the wife of former 49ers defensive back Eric Davis called up EA Sports to complain about her husband's rating. Listening to Brook talk was an awesome experience, one that I wouldn't have truly connected with if my parents hadn't got me the game that Christmas. Thanks, Mom and Dad. –Patrick Hickey Jr.

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, Volume 1

PUBLISHER: Interplay Productions.
DEVELOPER: Interplay Productions.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Based on the first book in Tolkien's highly influential Lord of the Rings trilogy, *J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, Volume 1* has players guiding Frodo Baggins through enormous dungeons, caves, plains, forests, and other areas of Middle Earth (including Rivendell, The River Brandywine, The Barrow-Downs, and The Mines of Moria), trying to deliver the fabled ring to safety. Along the way, he will encounter Pippin, Aragorn, Gandalf, and other friends that can be controlled by other players.

Unfortunately, when the computer controls Frodo's companions, they tend to wander aimlessly and get themselves killed. There are wolves, orcs, snakes, trolls, bats, and other enemies to battle (in real time) throughout this massive quest, and, thankfully, players can outfit their characters with armor, swords, axes, daggers, and other weapons. Additional items to find include gold, healing ferns, amulets, keys, eyeglasses, clues, and more. Despite its title, this disappointing, hard-to-find game did not spawn a sequel. Much different than the 1990 computer game, which has the similar title of *J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, Vol. I*.

Notable Quotable:

"The music is pretty grand. It's bright for the town, somber for the plains, dark for the caves and the Mines of Moria. Unfortunately, there seems to be about five tracks total . . . Character sprites are well animated . . . The plot is extremely Tolkien-light; you pretty much get the edited highlights. The game ends before the first part of the book ends. The characters are faceless and totally interchangeable. Although they have face portraits, you only see these on the sub-screen . . . The four hobbits all use the same sprites, step in unison, and are distinguished only by the color of their hoods . . . The character graphics are also rather small in scale compared to the rest of the screen, which can make for difficulty in attacking small enemies. Background tiles get reused constantly, so every cave looks the same. The game also suffers from a lack of enemies early on as you only seem to fight snakes, wolves, and bats . . . The hit detection is truly irksome. Since you have not quite a bird's-eye view, hitting anything when facing up or down is an exercise in frustration . . . Interestingly, it is easier to hit with the hobbits in the first half of the game than it is with Aragorn in the second, due to their hit animations. *J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, Vol. I* for the PC is far superior to this." –Moby Games (www.mobygames.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*The Lord of the Rings, Volume 1* promised so much prior to its release in 1994. Magazine previews spoke of a revolutionary adventure with peerless visuals and incredible gameplay—a title to challenge the likes of *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* and the countless other action RPGs available on the SNES. The final product was in fact a million miles away from what was originally mooted and ranks as one of the most bitterly disappointing uses of Tolkien's world in the realm of interactive entertainment. There are faint glimmers of quality here; the soundtrack is wonderful and almost worth enduring the pain of the gameplay in order to sample. There are also moments when you're able to ignore the pointless fetch quests and get a feel for what it would be like to journey through The Shire on your risky mission. However, these moments are few and far between, trampled and lost amid the downright broken game design, terrible controls, laughable A.I., and almost non-existent plot. Tolkien was famously very skeptical about media adaptations of his work; it's likely that almost two decades after it was first released, he's still spinning in his grave about the disaster that is *The Lord of the Rings, Volume 1*." –Damien McFerran (www.nintendolife.com)

Sniffer Publishing LTD

Judge Dredd

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Probe Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

Based on the 1995 feature film starring Sylvester Stallone in the title role and Rob Schneider as his sidekick, *Judge Dredd* casts players as a futuristic law enforcer authorized to use lethal force. Dredd is outfitted with a Lawgiver handgun, which can fire a variety of ammunition types, including heat seekers, missiles (ricochet, incendiary, high explosive, and armor piercing), grenades, and an unlimited supply of general purpose shells. In addition to shooting and arresting enemies, Dredd, who can walk, run, jump, crouch, crawl, climb, punch, kick, headbutt, and fly (with an anti-grav belt), must collect books of law, push objects to reveal pick-ups, and use security cards to open sealed doors.

The game, which offers rock-solid action and a much better time in general than the film, features twelve levels: Block War, Breakout at Aspen, Shuttle Crash in Cursed Earth, Prepare for the Final Fight, Locate Rico, Escape from the Judge Hunters, Access the Janus Lab, Enter the Janus Lab, Invasion by Gila Munja, RC 4 Hostage Situation, Riots in Mega-City One, Aboard Justice One, and Final Judgement. The SNES version has superior controls to the Genesis game. Also released for the Game Boy and Game Gear.

Fun Fact:
British comic book character Judge Dredd debuted in 1977, in issue #2 of *2000 AD*, a weekly science fiction anthology.

Notable Quotable:
"What *Judge Dredd* lacks in originality, it more than makes up for in playability. The control is superb, which is really necessary in a game like this. The weapons are nice, but you really don't notice much of a difference in the damage from the attacks. The music is very repetitive, but the sound effects are decent. Another minor gripe is that each stage with a level looks way too similar to the previous one. A little variety wouldn't hurt. *Judge Dredd* is a solid shooter with action flair." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1995)

Insider Insight:
Even at an impressionable age when seeing any movie made it the best movie ever, I didn't like the Stallone version of *Judge Dredd* from 1995, not even in the so-bad-it's-kinda-awesome way I do now. I rented the SNES game that tied in with it, but it didn't really leave a lasting impression.

Flash forward to 2012. I was one of the five or six people who went to see the absolutely brilliant *Dredd* [starring Karly Urban in the title role] in theaters. After witnessing its majesty, I came home and ordered every single Judge Dredd video game that was released in North America.

It took me a while to eventually get around to *Judge Dredd* on the SNES, but when I did, I fell in love with it. I got the sense that the people behind the game loved the property and jumped at the chance to make it, even though it was a movie title. Unlike most tie-in games that end and roll credits approximately in conjunction with the film, that only marks the halfway point for *Judge Dredd*. Once you defeat the big bad from the movie, the game goes on for a few more hours, culminating in a boss fight against Judge Death, a fan-favorite villain from the comics.

Judge Dredd is a difficult game, as it features sprawling levels that are easy to get lost in and a very limited password system, meaning you almost have to finish it in one sitting. I can see many people throwing in the towel, and I completely understand that, but for those willing to give it a chance, you'll not only come away with a beloved SNES game in your rotation, but a better understanding of the Judge Dredd character as well. –Blair Farrell

Schiffer Publishing LTD

The Jungle Book, Disney's

PUBLISHER: Virgin Interactive Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Virgin Interactive Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Based on the 1967 Disney animated film, *The Jungle Book* puts players in the role of Mowgli as he runs, jumps, climbs, and swings (on vines, of course) through eleven levels of play, collecting gems for continues and for entering one of five bonus rounds. You're equipped with unlimited bananas for throwing at the bats, monkeys, snakes, scorpions, and other enemies you'll encounter, plus you can gather papayas (which bounce along the ground and explode on contact), coconuts (which you roll like a bowling ball), and mangos (which home in on the nearest enemy). Prominent enemies you'll face include Kaa the Snake, who can hypnotize you with his beady eyes; King Louie, an orangutan who aims to keep you trapped in ancient ruins; and Shere Khan, the most feared tiger in the jungle. You'll also contend with such obstacles as cacti, prickly pears, falling rocks, and fire-breathing gargoyles.

Fortunately, there are also helpful items and creatures, including seesaws, boulders (for pushing and standing on), spring snakes, a rideable parrot, vulture feathers (for climbing to safety), stick insects (which can return you to a higher tier when you fall), bouncy branches, and jungle idols (which perform different tricks and allow access to hidden areas). Even Baloo the Bear is here to lend a helping hand. Modes of play include hard, normal and practice, and the game features a nice instrumental version of the Academy Award-nominated song, "The Bare Necessities." The SNES version is quite a bit different than its Genesis counterpart, which features different level designs, a pea shooter weapon, a mask of invulnerability you can wear, a level timer, and a compass pointing your way to the next gem. *The Jungle Book* was also adapted (in varying forms) for the NES, Game Boy, and Game Gear.

Notable Quotable:

"If you want an intense run-jump-shoot game, check out the Genny [Genesis] version. If you want a little puzzle-solving with your platform action, check out [the SNES] version." –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (August 1994)

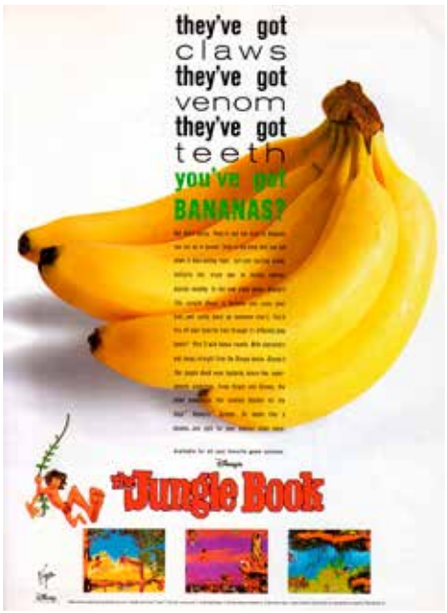
Notable Quotable:

"Don't be put off by the cartoony, good-natured gameplay. This long game is deceptively difficult, made harder by the lack of continues and passwords. However, the lush jungle graphics and personable characters will make you want to forge ahead. This is one 'Book' worth reading again." –*GamePro* (July 1994)

Insider Insight:

Aladdin, especially the Genesis version, is a longtime favorite when it comes to platformers based on hit Disney movies. *The Lion King* is super popular as well. Although it's not as universally praised, *The Jungle Book* is no slouch. Virgin took themes from the classic 1967 animated film and tried to make a fun platformer. They succeeded, partly because the game was perfect for all ages—something that really couldn't be said for the overly difficult *The Lion King*. (Though I liked that, too, for insane reasons.)

My favorite thing about *The Jungle Book* for the SNES is the soundtrack. "Bare Necessities" is here, of course, but there are great original tunes as well. The music goes together nicely with the animations in the game, as well as the level design and the always-enjoyable control. The game doesn't get much credit as a Disney classic because of obviously more popular titles, but it's an exceptional title in its own right. Perhaps an HD release is in order, especially considering the popularity of the live action movie remake. –Robert Workman



Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Jungle Strike

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: Gremlin Interactive.
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

The second game in the Strike series, *Jungle Strike* finds the Desert Madman from Desert Strike dead, but now his son, who has teamed up with a drug lord and an army of high-tech mercenaries, is plotting a nuclear strike against the U.S. The isometric, mission-based action is similar to *Desert Strike*, but players now pilot a Comanche Helicopter (as opposed to an Apache Helicopter), which is equipped with hellfire, hydra, and chain gun weaponry. If you bump into an object, your armor loses ten points, and you lose control of your chopper momentarily. However, dropping off passengers at landing sites will restore some of your armor. You must also refuel from time to time.

Jungle Strike boasts three new vehicles: an XL-9 Hovercraft (water mines, light rockets, machine gun), a Special Forces Assault Cycle (land mines, light rockets, machine gun), and an F-117 Nighthawk Stealth Fighter (ironbombs, AIM-92 rockets, machine gun). To defeat the enemy, you must complete a number of objectives through nine levels of play, including protecting monuments, guarding the presidential motorcade, stopping drug shipments, and destroying guard towers, terrorists, and other enemy targets. Compared to *Desert Strike*, *Jungle Strike* has more detailed graphics, better animations, and tougher enemy A.I. (making for a more gradual difficulty progression). Followed by *Urban Strike* (SNES, Genesis, Game Boy, Game Gear), *Soviet Strike* (Saturn, PSX, PS3, PSP, PS Vita), and *Nuclear Strike* (N64, PSX, PS3, PSP).

Insider Insight:
The Strike series is one that will forever be tied with the 16-bit era. While it might be a little more closely connected with the Sega Genesis, where it premiered, it's one of those franchises that helped define a gaming generation. *Desert Strike* and its sequel *Jungle Strike* had a level of sophistication that wasn't possible prior to 16-bit due to its detailed isometric graphics (the game engine was actually repurposed from a failed attempt at a flight simulator), and the gameplay offered an interesting blend of action and strategy that hadn't really been pulled off in such a way before.

And while the game was single-player, I fondly remember afternoons playing with friends, taking turns with various missions and otherwise just helping each other with tips while watching the action. While the Strike series eventually graduated to other platforms like the PlayStation and Nintendo 64, the visuals shifted to 3D and in turn lost their isometric charm and 16-bit sprite quality. –Sam Kennedy

Insider Insight:
After the success of *Desert Strike* for the Genesis, many gamers (including myself) were eagerly awaiting the inevitable follow-up, which turned out to be the aptly named *Jungle Strike*. Unfortunately, I didn't get to play this sequel until it was released a bit later on the Super Nintendo.

Jungle Strike was definitely more of the same, gameplay-wise, but that wasn't a bad thing by any means. The combat helicopter escapades of *Desert Strike* kept me entertained for hours on end while also managing to take the edge off of a rather tense situation—I was of draft age when the first GulfWar broke out, and there was talk of re-instituting the draft—so I was going to play the sequel regardless . . . It just took me a bit to get around to it.

The reason for this delay was that I had recently become a father; my money and, more importantly, my time were at a premium. But when I finally did get to play *Jungle Strike*, it was my young son's reaction to one of the cooler wrinkles added to the action that has stuck in my memory. In this game, you get to pilot several vehicles other than the standard helicopter. One of these is the F-117 Nighthawk, the badass stealth fighter that looks like it was ripped from the pages of a Batman comic book. Anytime I used this slick aircraft, my son, who was almost always bopping about in the background somewhere, would point at the TV screen and scream, "DA PLAAAANE!! DA PLAAAANE!!"

This always made me chuckle because how could one not think of Hervé Villechaize's iconic Tattoo character from the TV show, *Fantasy Island*, upon hearing that? Any reference to a classic '70s TV program is a good one, and I have *Jungle Strike* to thank for this fun trip down memory lane. –Jerry Bonner

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Jurassic Park

PUBLISHER: Ocean of America.
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software.
GAME TYPE: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter/Adventure/First-Person Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Based on Steven Spielberg's visually stunning film from 1993, *Jurassic Park* for the SNES puts players in the role of Alan Grant (played by Sam Neill in the movie), trapped on a theme park island with dinosaurs running amok. In addition to battling the behemoths with a cattle prod, a shotgun, a missile launcher, a tranquilizer gun, gas grenades, and bolas (which spread out and wrap around a dinosaur or group of dinos, trapping them and then exploding), Dr. Grant must complete a number of objectives in order. These include activating motion sensors (by reaching the main generator and powering up the computer), securing the visitor's center, stopping escaping raptors (by finding your way onboard a ship and destroying them), destroying raptor nests (with a nerve gas bomb you must find), radioing for help (by finding the communications room), and reaching the heli-pad.

Items you can find for help in completing the objectives include dinosaur eggs, food, access cards (including cards that open and close doors), first-aid kits, and batteries, which automatically turn on your night goggles when you enter a dark room. Gameplay is vaguely similar to the NES rendition, but with better graphics, different weapons, and some highly impressive, SNES Mouse-compatible, first-person shooter sequences. Much different than the Genesis and Sega CD versions of *Jurassic Park*.

Notable Quotable:

"I didn't think any video game would be able to capture the excitement of the movie, but *Jurassic Park* is thrill-a–minute stuff. What first impressed me was the funky jungle-esque music: ripe snare drums mixed with rhythmic bongos and sudden orchestral chords to swing the mood. Once your ears are settled in, your eyes are transfixed by the luscious graphics. Jungle vegetation looks dense and realistic while the smooth scrolling during the 3D stages is astounding . . . The dinosaurs behave realistically, with some only attacking if you start blazing off rounds of ammunition . . . With so many tasks to complete, there's no arguing that *Jurassic Park* has a lot going for it; the presentation is only the tip of the prehistoric island . . . Devotees of the film rejoice." –*SNES Force* (December 1993)

Scrfer Publishing

Insider Insight:
This has to be the best game with the worst ending I've ever played. To say that *Jurassic Park* was an obsession of mine when it came out would be an understatement, and I was remarkably jealous of my Genesis-owning friends who were enjoying running around as velociraptors. When *Jurassic Park* finally hit the SNES, I was a little bummed at first that it was completely different than the Genesis version, but after a few minutes of playing I realized that I was the lucky one. *Jurassic Park* on Genesis was cool, but this game was fantastic. And hard. Did I mention it's hard? Because it is. Very hard. The dinosaurs are incredibly dangerous, and the first-person segments can be easy to get lost in. It also doesn't have any saving or passwords, so if you're going to beat it, it's got to be done in one shot.

I spent months and months mastering this game, and when I finally did, after all that toil and heartache, what did I get for my trouble? The intro that plays every time you turn the game on, except in reverse, followed by about three minutes of what sounds like someone repeatedly dropping a trash can lid on a tile floor. Don't get me wrong, the game itself is totally worth the trouble, and I dare anyone not to tap their toes to the awesome soundtrack (especially the hilarious elevator music), but that ending still stings. –Kris Randazzo

Insider Insight:
It's truth time, SNES fans: I far prefer the Sega Genesis version of *Jurassic Park* to this one. The digitized sprites, eerie soundtrack and atmosphere, and the fact none of the weapons could actually kill the dinosaurs made it a unique and engrossing experience. Plus, of course, you could play as the raptor! Just let that settle in for a moment—THE FREAKING RAPTOR. Truly, this was the ideal game, at a perfect moment in time, to define perfectly the rivalry between the SNES and the Genesis.

Much like *Star Wars* years before it, everyone saw *Jurassic Park*, and most everyone loved it. We at least had that common ground. Meanwhile, if you were a kid, you also wore the T-shirt, drank from the laminated cup (which gave cola a nasty plastic taste), and played the video games, which sparked arguments over which system had the best one. As an SNES owner, I jealously played the Genesis version at my friend Paul's house, then would go home to play the NES and SNES games (yes, I loved *Jurassic Park* so much I double dipped).

The SNES title was fun, and I convinced myself its first-person Mode 7 segments were just as good as *DOOM* on my other friend's PC, but I never completed it. For such a complex game, it's baffling they never included passwords like the Sega release (Genesis doing what Nintendon't!). Even years later, with emulation and save states, I still haven't finished *Jurassic Park* on SNES. But it doesn't matter because the game is now like a time capsule. Simply seeing the opening brings back countless memories from that special era. –John Szczepaniak

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Jurassic Park 2:
The Chaos Continues

PUBLISHER: Ocean of America.
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Eschewing the overhead adventure design of the original *Jurassic Park* for the SNES, *Jurassic Park 2: The Chaos Continues* is a fairly standard platform shooter, with players, as Dr. Alan Grant, running, jumping, and shooting dinosaurs through six missions: Raptor Attack (taking place in an underground power complex), T-Rex Carnage (jungle), Blockade (control room), High Ptera (Nublar Mont mountain), Seek and Destroy (volcanic taverns), and Protect the Gallimimus (an area with land mines and bomb-dropping choppers). After you complete a mission, you can select from the remaining missions. In addition, random emergency missions will pop up.

To lend a helping hand, a second player can join in as Tactical Sergeant Michael Wolfskin. Your standard weapon is a rifle, but you can also equip a machine gun and a shotgun. There are non-lethal weapons as well (cattle prod, tranquilizer gun, and tranquilizer missile launcher), which are important because if you kill too many dinosaurs the game will end, which is a novel concept. While the gameplay is action-heavy, there are non-linear elements, along with such objectives as gassing a power complex, locating a missing scientist in a maze-like jungle, and planting explosives inside a volcano. Much different than the Game Boy version.

Memories:
A lot of reviewers complained that *Jurassic Park 2* was a run-of-the-mill run-and-gun title, as opposed to a more intricate adventure like the first game. I typically prefer pick-up-and-play action so I had no problem with the change of genre. I've seen every Jurassic Park movie at the theater and multiple times at home, so games based on the franchise are always on my radar.

Notable Quotable:
"If you've played through and enjoyed *Contra III*, waste no time tracking this title down . . . it remains one of the most underrated titles on the system . . . nothing beats this game's sound . . . Presented in rare Dolby Surround, this game just works the sound chip, stretching it as far as it will go . . . the incredible orchestrated tracks are nothing short of brilliant . . . The opening intro, easily the most impressive on the console, features full voice work and pounding sound effects." – Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Yet another tarnished jewel on the Jurassic Park franchise crown has arrived . . . we can only hope that this isn't what Steven Spielberg has in mind for the sequel. In this tremendously tedious run-and-shoot game, you travel around the island and perform boring adventures on screens that begin to look a bit too familiar level after level. The graphics are pretty cool, but that doesn't save this game from being a sustained exercise in tedium." –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (March 1995)

Insider Insight:
I have an issue with Ocean's games: ninety percent of them are crap. I certainly felt this way toward their SNES version of *Jurassic Park*, and when they released a follow-up (not based on a film, but a continuation of the first game) in the form of *Jurassic Park 2:The Chaos Continues*, I was not excited in the slightest. However, boredom will make you do stupid things. I rented it from a local video store and found it to be surprisingly entertaining. It's definitely not a good game, but my lowered expectations allowed me to enjoy it in a guilty pleasure sort of way. There are horrible design choices, such as hiding paths you need to take with foreground objects, and the difficulty is high, but the music is astoundingly cinematic, and it plays like a poor man's *Contra*. It's fun, but flawed, which is more than I can say about most of Ocean's library. –Christopher Pico

Source Publishing LTD

Justice League Task Force

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Blizzard Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Released the same year as the original arcade version of *Marvel Super Heroes* by Capcom, *Justice League Task Force* pits DC Comics' Justice League of America members Batman, Superman, Flash, Green Arrow, Aquaman, and Wonder Woman against one another in a series of *Street Fighter II*-style, one-on-one fights (regrettably, Green Lantern didn't make the cut). Using punches, kicks, and their patented gadgets and super powers (heat vision, Batarangs, tornado spins, flame arrows, tiara tosses, and the like), the heroes also battle Cheetah, Despero, and Darkseid, who has declared war on Earth. Unfortunately, the special moves are hard to pull off, making them all but worthless—enemies will pummel your character while you futilely attempt to get the controller to respond to semi-elaborate commands.

The standard fighting action is fun, however, and special settings give gamers the option of playing at crazy-fast speeds, making for a raucous good time. Some argue that it's silly to pit such physically weaker characters as Batman and Green Arrow against the god-like Superman and Wonder Woman, but who cares? It's simply cool to fight as DC heroes. It's also cool that you get to battle in themed comic book settings, such as on top of The Daily Planet and in front of The Flash Museum. The SNES game has marginally better graphics and music than its Genesis counterpart.

Notable Quotable:

"The bottom line is that it's a solidly 2D sprite-based fighting game, no better or worse than a hundred other titles. If you've absolutely got to have every fighting game ever made or you're the world's biggest DC fan, then by all means, check it out. Otherwise, it's mostly good for about a half hour of excitement, followed by a lot of yawning." –*Game Players* (July 1995)

Insider Insight:

Two things stick out to me regarding *Justice League Task Force*, neither of which has to do with how it actually played as a fighting game—which was fine for what it was. I played through it when it came out, during the absolute apex of my comic book fandom, and was struck by one particular fact: It had absolutely nothing to do with the *Justice League Task Force* comic book of the day, which itself was an offshoot of *Justice League America*—which is really what this game should have been called given its lineup of DC heavy-hitters (er . . . and Cheetah). The most prominent consistent member of the Task Force in the comics—itself a bit of a revolving door—was its leader, Martian Manhunter, and he's not even in this game.

But only in recent years have I learned what's truly interesting—even downright influential to the overall face of gaming. In 2015, I was fortunate enough to do PR for Marvel Heroes at Gazillion, where I worked for legendary game designer David Brevik, whose first superhero game was the Genesis version of *Justice League Task Force*. I loved listening to his old industry stories, especially of one particular Consumer Electronics Show (before the days of E3) where he represented his studio, Condor.

According to David, his team had no idea until they were at that CES that an SNES version of *Justice League Task Force* was in the works and also being shown off by a completely different developer trying to make its name on the video gaming landscape—Blizzard Entertainment. The two teams hit it off, and the next thing you know, they're unifying into Blizzard North. This awesome team-up finally allowed David the resources he needed to fully realize a concept he's had since high school. We know it today as *Diablo*. Thanks for making that possible, *Justice League Task Force*. –Chris Baker

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Ka-blooey

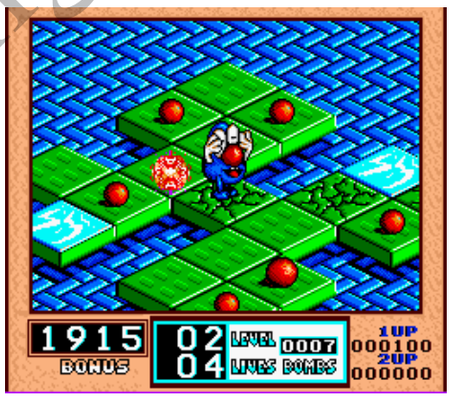
PUBLISHER: Kemco.
DEVELOPER: Kemco.
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1992.

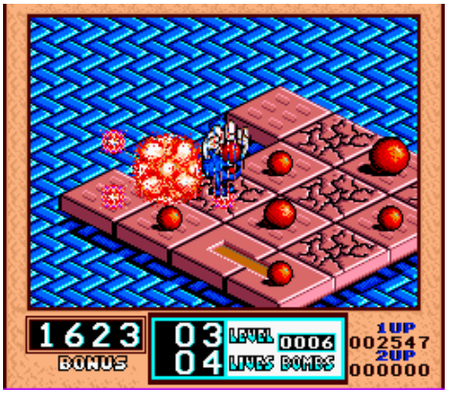
Adapted from the 1988 computer game, *Bombuzal*, *Ka-blooey* is a low-budget puzzler in which players control a little bug-eyed creature with an affinity for detonating bombs. Viewed from an isometric perspective, each of the game's 130 levels takes place on an arrangement of tile islands. There are three types of bombs (small, medium, and large), each of which blows up the block it's on and, in the case of medium and large bombs, a certain number of surrounding tiles. The key strategy is to detonate the bombs in the right order to avoid being stranded without any tiles to stand on. Later levels introduce enemies, transporters, slippery tiles, mines, and other obstacles.

Gameplay is tricky enough to please hardcore puzzle fans, and the password feature staves off frustration to some degree, but maneuvering the character diagonally is a bit of an imprecise chore, at least initially. Other setbacks include a repetitive voice sample ("Get ready!"), a horrendous song that repeats itself ad nauseam, and graphics that would look at home on the more primitive NES.

Notable Quotable:

"*Ka-blooey* forces you to plan out all your actions with foresight and precision, as one mistake will result in restarting the level. This brain-twisting, bomb-bursting gameplay is not a bad premise, though it often leads to absurdly complex and frustrating levels . . . All the bombs are exactly the same color, and it is difficult to tell a small bomb from a medium one, leading to cheap death . . . the angle of the view is awkward, making it unclear which direction is left, up, or down, leading to pressing the wrong direction and walking off the edge . . . The angle also makes it hard to tell how large the blast radiuses for bombs are . . . There were noticeable seconds in *Ka-blooey* when I actually planned something out and it actually worked . . . Yet these seconds of feeling good were completely overpowered by the hours of being constantly frustrated . . . there are flashes of solid puzzling beneath all the crap in this game; the complex level designs are satisfying to beat after spending long, rage-inducing sessions on them." –Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)





Scarfet Publishing LLC

Kawasaki Caribbean Challenge

PUBLISHER: GameTek.
DEVELOPER: Park Place Productions.
GAME TYPE: Motorcycle Racing/ Jet Ski Racing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Viewed from a top-down perspective, this arcade-style racer has you racing five laps against four other motorcycles or watercraft. You'll select from one of three licensed Ninja bikes (ZX-6, ZX7R, ZX11) or three licensed jet skis (550SX, 650SX, 750SX) prior to racing on one of three islands: Port Elizabeth, Treasure Cay, or Wreckers Reef. A radar display of the entire course is at the bottom/ right side of the screen. Prior to racing, you'll enter a time trial to determine your position. In addition to avoiding other vehicles, you must dodge such obstacles as coconuts, oil slicks, water puddles, sand, white water, and buoys. In both modes, you can bank around corners, but, of course, only the motorcycles have brakes.

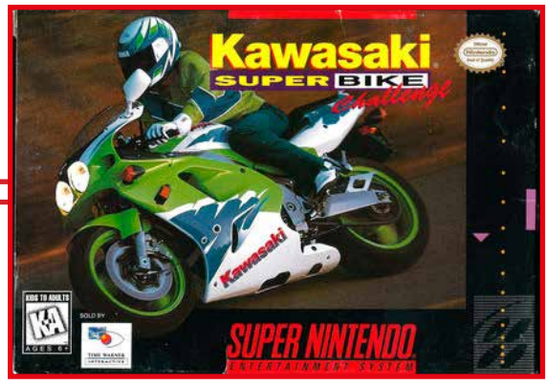
Notable Quotable:

"Your motorcycle looks like a big blob, and the scenery is totally lame. I was hoping for a tropical paradise, but all I got was a few bales of hay. The jet ski races play exactly the same, but the tracks are so wide you can't see the boundaries! Trying to figure out where to go is no fun at all. The water looks fake, and the pixelated sunbathers look like something from an Atari 5200 game. The horrible engine noise sounds like a swarm of bees! Could this game get any worse? Yes. Would you believe you actually have to run a *qualifying* lap just to gain entrance into each race?! Qualifying laps always suck, but in this game they're just insulting." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Kawasaki SuperBike Challenge

PUBLISHER: Time Warner Interactive.
DEVELOPER: Lankhor.
GAME TYPE: Motorcycle Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.



Notable Quotable:
"As far as racing games go, this finishes right behind ColecoVision's *The Dukes of Hazzard*. Pathetic." –*Flux* (October 1995)

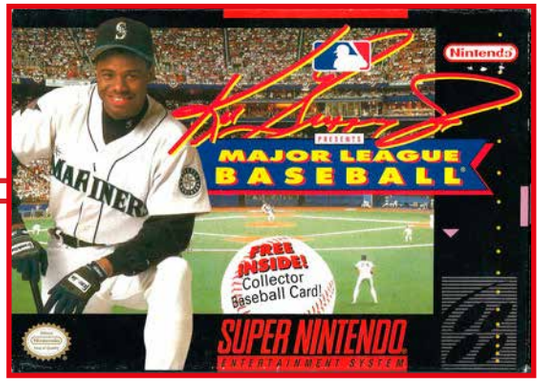
Viewed from a first-person perspective (the windshield and display meters of your motorcycle are visible, as are your hands on the steering wheel), *Kawasaki SuperBike Challenge* has players racing on fifteen different twisting, turning tracks (including the extra-long Suzuka 8-Hour Endurance Race), trying to make the best time. Players can turn the weather on or off, select from three types of tires (slick, medium, and wet), and choose between manual or automatic transmission and high or low gears (high is faster, but low makes cornering easier). Other options include four difficulty levels, two game modes (Training and Championship), music on or off, and number of laps (five, ten, or fifteen). Pit stops are available, as is a two-player split-screen mode. Also released for the Genesis. Much different than the Game Gear version. Known as *Kawasaki Superbikes* in Europe.

Notable Quotable:
"The Game Gear version, running on simpler hardware, opts for a third-person approach similar to *Hang-On* . . . The Mega Drive [Genesis] and Super NES versions opt for a first-person perspective and attempt to render parts of the course in 3D. In both cases, frame rate is affected, but while the Super NES version runs faster than its Mega Drive sibling, the Mega Drive renders all its scenery in 3D (save for rival bikes, which are sprites). On the Super NES, scenery such as trees and spectators are also sprites, with only the occasional piece of 3D geometry being rendered in 3D. The Super NES also has less scenery than the Mega Drive version, which renders walls, buildings, street lamps, bridges, and rounded tunnels. Sprites are also scaled and rotated in real time on the Mega Drive, despite the console lacking the native hardware support to do so. Conversely, no sprite scaling is in place on the Super NES, with the engine swapping out different sized sprites and creating a 'jerky' look in the process." –Sega Retro (segaretro.org)

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Software Creations.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



Though it lacks real player names (other than Griffey Jr., of course), this fun, fast-paced game does include all the Major League teams, along with four modes of play: Exhibition, All-Star Game (which includes a Home Run Derby), World Series, and Season. Players can bunt, lead off base, steal bases, run to the previous base, make diving catches, pick off runners, climb outfield walls, do hit-and-runs, and remove and insert players. In addition, the game features authentic player stats, programmable rosters (meaning gamers can change the names of the players), and real life stadiums, such as Fenway Park (denoted by the Green Monster) and Wrigley Field (complete with ivy-covered outfield wall). You view the action from behind home plate, windows show runners on base, and the camera follows the ball when it's hit into play.

The manual for the game is more elaborate than most, featuring a history of baseball, info on the teams, and biographies for Ken Griffey Jr. and American League umpire Steve Palermo, whose voice you hear in the game. Also fun are the fictitious player names, such as Cliff Claven, Norm Peterson, and Sam Malone from the Boston-based TV show *Cheers* playing for the Boston Red Sox.

Notable Quotable:

"I really like [that] you can program the name of every player . . . the rosters are exact duplicates of the real thing, sans names . . . If you want real teams, just program the names in . . . I opted to turn Detroit into a team of all-time Tiger greats . . . I turned the Blue Jays into the 'classic video game heroes' team (Mr. Do leads off, Pac-Man at clean-up). I made the Rockies into an all-conservative team, and I even constructed an all-video-game-friends team (Joe Santulli is a washed-up pitcher on the Marlins) . . . The players are large, cartoony caricatures. They aren't at all lifelike, but the action is well-animated, and I find the visual presentation is preferable to those with realistic graphics and choppy movement . . . Gameplay is arcade-style and fairly solid . . . Batting involves a little timing and a lot of luck . . . Running is way too complicated . . . Fielding can also be frustrating . . . You'll miss lots of plays, only because you can't see where your infielder is relative to the ball until it's too late . . . very easy to pick up and enjoy . . . because of the problems, my recommendation is modest." –Jeff Cooper (*Digital Press* fanzine #23, May/June 1995)

Insider Insight:

Perhaps the best way to measure the greatness of a sports game is by how many fights it provokes between friends. And between myself and Josh Benedek (my childhood best friend), *Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball* incited more arguments, shoving matches, and hours-long silent treatments than any other game ever made. Maybe it was because the superhero-sized players elicited larger-than-life emotions (especially when embarrassed hitters broke bats over their knees). Or maybe it was because the little screen—the one that charted base-runner progress in the corner—always seemed to be a little more optimistic than the play on the field. Or maybe, just maybe, it was because *Griffey* was the first-ever sports game to beautifully calibrate luck, skill, and the visceral joy of turning a 4-6-3 double play. –Blake J. Harris

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Ken Griffey Jr.'s Winning Run

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1996.

Developed by Rare, the company responsible for *Donkey Kong Country*, *Ken Griffey Jr.'s Winning Run* has the same type of enjoyable, arcade-style action as *Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball*, but alters the formula with more detailed graphics, superior crowd noises and voice effects, and different camera angles (the stadium/crowd is now visible in the background when players are up to bat). Fielders can jump, dive, and do super throws, which are stronger but more likely to go offline. Pitchers can attempt pickoffs and throw fastballs, super fastballs, curveballs, super curves, sliders, changeups, and knuckleballs. While on offense, you can steal bases, bunt, and hit the ball in such a way as to increase the chance of a ground ball or a fly ball.

Options in the game include outfield shifts, trades, adjustable innings, and the ability to bring in relief pitchers and pinch hitters. Modes of play include MLB Challenge (1P VS COM, 1P VS 2P, or Exhibition), World Series (1P VS COM or 1P VS 2P), or All-Star Game (1P VS COM, 1P VS 2P, or Homerun Derby). The players appear less cartoonish than in *Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball*, but they still have fake names and authentic stats. Unfortunately, you can't customize the names of the players.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are wonderful . . . the arcade-style gameplay is lots of fun. But for several reasons, I can't give this one a really high rating . . . besides Griffey himself, there are no Major League players . . . the cart does not allow you to program in the names of Major Leaguers (or your friends or whatever) . . . there are inexcusable glitches in gameplay—for example, your runner on first will often be thrown out at second on a ground single to center." –Jeff Cooper (*Digital Press* fanzine #31, July/August 1996)

Insider Insight:

If you've played a baseball video game, you should know what to expect from *Ken Griffey Jr's Winning Run*: innings, pitchers, home runs—you know, standard baseball fare, albeit with some fantastic visuals. What makes *Winning Run* interesting to me is how, as a Sega kid, I never played the classic SNES games in my youth, but I did play this one for one reason: the theme song.

At my local KB Toys in Norwalk, Connecticut, I would always run over to the video game section to see what games were on display for customers to try out. One day as I was looking around, I remember hearing very clearly, "No one can stop this!", followed by a high-energy techno track. I hurried over to the SNES, and it was demoing *Ken Griffey Jr's Winning Run*. I sat there and played the game for seemingly hours, humming the theme song while enjoying the solid baseball mechanics and lovely visuals.

I'd even venture to say that I'd put the theme song to *Ken Griffey Jr's Winning Run* in my list of "Top 10 Video Game Themes of All Time." Maybe it's a bit of nostalgia and personal preference, but that theme song makes this baseball title an all-time classic. –Shawn Long

Insider Insight:

In the 1990s, Ken Griffey Jr. was a god. He had the prettiest swing, the biggest smile, the coolest Nikes, and, of course, he could catch anything hit to him. *Ken Griffey Jr's Winning Run*, while it lacked any real players besides him, was a fun baseball game that really highlighted the end of a wonderful era.

Winning Run was released near the end of the system's lifespan and right around the time I was begging my parents for a Sony PlayStation. One of the last sports games I played on the Super Nintendo, it made me realize how far the technology had come. This was not *Baseball Simulator 1,000* or *MLBPA Baseball*. This game was pretty. Seeing umpires move into position before every pitch and the attention to detail with broadcaster Joe Buck doing the play-by-play made it such a special farewell for the console.

Winning Run looks amazing, so much so that I remember my dad trying to convince me that I didn't need the PlayStation just yet. And to be fair, the game actually looks almost as good and plays much better than *MLB Pennant Race*, Sony's first baseball game, also released in 1996. Unfortunately, I was a dumb thirteen-year-old and was willing to trade in wonderful memories for a sexy new system. Luckily, more than a decade later, I picked this one back up. –Patrick Hickey Jr.

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Kendo Rage

PUBLISHER: Seta U.S.A.
DEVELOPER: Affect.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Jo has gone to Japan to study Kendo, which is Japanese fencing. Once there, she discovers that she must instead save the world. This involves using a special sword to hack and slash through bad guys, swordsmen, ghosts, pandas, fish, and a variety of strange creatures and other enemies in seven timed stages: Cliff Hanger, Ice Queen, The Pond, Technodyne, Commute, Triathalon, and School Daze. There are boss and mini-boss battles as well. Sword power-ups, which are called special attacks, consist of a spirit shotgun, a butterfly attack, streams of fire, and shields (which enable your sword to absorb one hit). To pull off special attacks, your "psychopower" meter must be charged, which is achieved by not attacking. You can also jump and do a dash attack, which is a powerful move that blasts enemies out of your way, but takes so much power to execute that it reduces your health meter. Items to grab as you go through the game include clocks (for stopping time), shish kebabs (health), rice bowls (health), and faces (extra lives). There are three skill levels: easy, normal, and hard. Known in Japan as *Makeruna! Makendō*.

Notable Quotable:

"Jo moves very slowly . . . while [you hold down] a direction on the d-pad, Jo will build up momentum. When Jo is moving down a slope she will gain a lot of speed, too. She'll gain so much speed that she will wildly start flailing out of control . . . The art in this game is wonderful. The characters are detailed and fun. The different levels are . . . a pleasure to look at. The music is quirky and fits the mood of the stages . . . it gives off the feeling of a Saturday morning anime . . . The difficulty, although not the worst, will have you gritting your teeth. This game prides itself on having you replay levels just to memorize attack patterns and enemy locations . . . The bosses are unique and funny . . . the Japanese dry humor found its way into the game." –Oprainfall (operationrainfall.com)

Insider Insight:

Back in the mid-1990s, I was in my formative years as an American otaku. I was in the Navy from '90 to '94, so my globetrotting afforded easy access to a wide variety of Japanese merchandise—video games being tied with art books as my most sought-after items. Once my time was up and I went back home, I realized just how lucky I had been to have such easy access to Japanese games. Cut to a fortuitous trip to my local Kay-Bee Toys store, and what do I find in the clearance bins—*Kendo Rage*! At the time I didn't know anything about the game, but the screenshots on the back were interesting. Plus, it was only $10!

Popping it in for the first time, I was pleasantly surprised at just how anime-flavored it was! Of course, the translation was somewhat silly: the main character, a nondescript school girl named "Mai" in the original Japanese version, was now Valley Girl transfer student "Jo" who was in Japan for Kendo summer school and monster bustin.' But I didn't care. To someone like me who was thirsty for anything having to do with the anime style, the game was like a gift. I now realize it was just a fun little platformer with a cute female protagonist, but at the time I thought it was the bee's knees. I still dig it today and will probably break it out and play it tonight! –Thor Thorvaldson

Scanner Publishing LTD

Kid Klown in Crazy Chase

PUBLISHER: Kemco.
DEVELOPER: Kemco.
GAME TYPE: Character Racing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

The sequel to *Kid Klown in Night Mayor World* (NES), *Crazy Chase* finds Her Royal Highness of Klown Planet kidnapped by the notorious space pirate, Blackjack. The game strays from the traditional side-scrolling action of its progenitor. Instead of jumping on platforms and throwing balloons, Kid Klown runs down hills (diagonally/to the right) in a race against a lit fuse (leading to a bomb) in five brief but busy stages: Forest, Town, Volcano, Ice, and Cave. Along the way, Kid, who can speed up, slow down, and steer right and left, must jump over, dodge, or otherwise avoid spikes, hedges, rolling logs, cannons, falling icicles, big blocks of ice, ghosts, hurdles, boulders, bursts of flame, flowing lava, and other obstacles, including things that come up from behind you. Falling into traps and hitting obstacles reduces Kid's HP meter.

During his journey, Kid can jump up and grab strings of blue balloons to get rides. Red balloons, on the other hand, contain items, such as power-ups (to make the fuse burn slower or Kid run faster) and coins (for more time and more tries in bonus stages, such as hockey and whack-a–mole). Be careful, though, some red balloons contain traps. The most important items to find are card symbols, four of which must be found within each level in order to complete it. If not, you have to repeat the level, which can be annoying. *Kid Klown in Crazy Chase* has nice animation and more humor than the average game, and it certainly offers an unusual gaming experience, but the fun is marred by frequent cheap hits. Followed by *The Bombing Islands* (PlayStation) and *Charlie Blast's Territory* (Nintendo 64).

Notable Quotable:

"Every single thing in this game is against you: the levels, the stuff in it, Blackjack, the game itself. You only have so much health, and if you die once, it's game over, and you must use one of your few continues . . . You'd think these [flying axes] would be extremely simple to dodge, but the controls don't make it so. If anything, I'm pretty sure they made the controls wonky on purpose so that you do get hit by stuff. Pressing down to start running goes from awkwardly sluggish to top speed in less than a second. This makes the jumping itself difficult to time or control . . . The only real novelty you can get from all this is intentionally getting hit by stuff so you can see what cartoonish animation plays out from it. To the game's credit, there are dozens, so it's pretty varied . . . The worst part is that all of these hilarious consequences have animations that go on so freaking long; all the while you watch the fuse go right past you . . . The whole game is just a means to piss you off . . . It's like the lead designer was bullied all his life and then made this to somehow bully everyone who plays his game, and he's the only one laughing." –ProJared (YouTube)

Insider Insight:

This is my absolute favorite title on the Super Nintendo. It is perhaps the only game with more bombs than *Bomberman*! I wasn't too keen on the NES precursor, *Night Mayor World*, or the sequel, *The Bombing Islands* on the PlayStation, but *Crazy Chase* got it just right! It had me laughing in stitches and slapping my knee like a schoolboy. Perhaps it reminded me of the neighborhood games of my youth—not because there was a creepy clown hiding in sewer drains à la Stephen King's *It*, but more so the traditional games of tag I'd play with little Janie, the proverbial girl next door.

In the game, the protagonist must rescue Princess Honey from a space pirate who had abducted her and warped away using his super-hyper-mega-really-fast-drive. During the chase, Kid Klown mistakenly presses the panic button instead of the molecular de-stabilizer laser beam demolisher ray button, thus resulting in a race through an obstacle course to defuse bombs just in the nick of time. Okay, so I admit that the game is not deep, but it is FUN. It is VERY FUN, and that's what it's all about! –Michael Thomasson

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Killer Instinct

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Rare.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Killer Instinct takes place in a bleak future where a powerful corporation called Ultratech produces weapons to sell to other corporations bent on destroying one another. To test these weapons, the company provides them to combatants in a popular game show called the Killer Instinct Tournament. Said tournament is a bloody series of one-on-one, *Mortal Kombat 3*-style fights organized into rounds consisting of one hundred seconds each. Your goal is to eliminate the other fighter's two life bars by pummeling the fighter senseless. You can jump, duck, and block, and you can thrash your opponent with punches, kicks, sweeps, uppercuts, and other standard moves. Each standard move has one of three levels of intensity: quick, medium, and fierce. To maximize your score, you should pull off combos and special moves. When your opponent is near death, you can pull off a Danger Move or an Ultra Combo, which is sometimes in excess of twenty hits.

There are eleven different aliens, mystics, undead creatures, and other fighters in the game, each endowed with numerous moves and weapons of his or her own. For example: Riptor, a hybrid of a dinosaur and a human being, can spew flaming venom, release dragon breath, and execute a claw uppercut; Saberwulf, a being afflicted with lycanthropy, can release a flaming bat, pull off a sabreslap, and let loose with a howl; and Cinder, a creature of living flame, has a killer heatfist, a wicked fireflash, and a devastating inferno move. The manual lists ten special moves for each fighter, but players can discover more advanced moves by experimenting with the controls. There are three basic ways to pull off special moves. A practice mode is available if you're not ready for the rigors of tournament play. Based on Midway's 1994 arcade game (which was remade for the Xbox One in 2013), *Killer Instinct* was once the pack-in game with the SNES console. Also released for the Game Boy (minus Cinder and Riptor).

Insider Insight:
Killer Instinct on the SNES was the first fighting game I ever truly mastered, and over time it's come to represent a sort of "coming-of-age" for me as a gamer. It was one of the last new 16-bit games I ever bought as things in the gaming scene were transitioning to full 3D graphics and more immersive experiences with Sony's PlayStation and the Nintendo 64. I remember the first time I heard about Nintendo's 64-bit "Project Reality" (the working title of what became the Nintendo 64) and how excited my friends and I were at what Nintendo was promising for the SNES's successor. *Killer Instinct* was among the first titles announced for the future console, initially as an arcade port that would be demonstrative of the system's proposed capabilities. With Rareware, developers of the monstrously successful Donkey Kong Country titles, making the game, we were sold immediately.

The arcade game blew us away the first time we saw it in person, and I have no idea how much money we spent playing it. Shortly after the arcade game's release, though, the "Nintendo Ultra 64" release was delayed by nearly a year. As a consolation prize, apparently, Nintendo announced a 16-bit port of *Killer Instinct* for the SNES. I remember saving up money all summer so I could get it at release. Predictably, it wasn't nearly as pretty or as polished as the arcade, missing the full-motion video sequences and incredible soundtrack. However, the fighting mechanics were solid as a rock, and it played and looked better than most other console fighting games at the time. The cartridge even came with the *Killer Cuts* CD, featuring all of the arcade game's original music. To me, this was like a small apology for the SNES cart's overly compressed music. –Kale Menges

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

King Arthur and the Knights of Justice

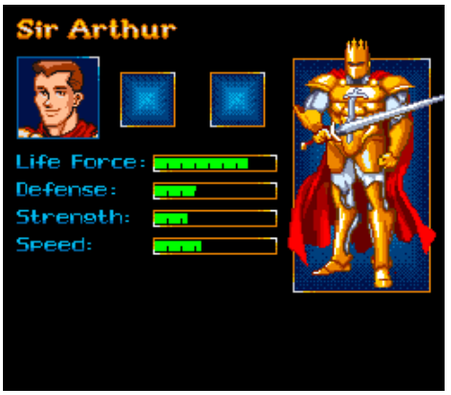
PUBLISHER: Enix America.
DEVELOPER: Manley & Associates.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action/Adventure, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Based on the obscure Saturday morning cartoon series (1992–1993), *King Arthur and the Knights of Justice* has the unlikely premise of Merlin traveling through time to recruit members of the New York Knights football team (who become knights) and their quarterback, Arthur King, who you control. Granted magical armor, your job is to rescue the Knights of the Round Table, who are imprisoned deep under the distant mountain stronghold of the sorceress Morgana. The 3/4 view, top-down action requires several tasks (though there are no puzzles, combos, or weapon upgrades to speak of), including recovering Excalibur and retrieving the Twelve Keys of Truth from Morgana's lieutenants, who act as bosses.

You must take two knights with you on your quest (specific knights battle specific bosses, but if that knight isn't in your party, you must fight the boss), but they are slow, seemingly clueless, and don't contribute much to the standard combat. Each knight is rated according to life force, defense, strength, and speed, but these stats don't change during the game, which is one reason why it's strictly an action/adventure title and not an RPG. Regarding combat, which is dull, limited, and plagued by murky hit detection, you can move up, down, right, and left, swing your sword, and block and parry with your shield. By retrieving magic shields, you can execute such special moves as hurl spikes and fire energy bolts. Your sword has a power gauge, which depletes with each swing—a fully powered attack will kill most enemies. This is a tough game to find complete, but hardly worth the search unless you're an SNES completist.

Notable Quotable:

"The cartoon was crap . . . Yet, for reasons that still baffle gamers, Enix of America decided to publish a licensed game about the cartoon. Surprise, surprise, the game was crap, too . . . an endless succession of fetch quests . . . The graphics are mediocre, the music is bland, and the sound effects are lousy . . . The character designs are terrible. The controls are sluggish. The plot is as generic as it gets. There are no puzzles or intellectual challenges to overcome . . . The Knights of Justice are the most useless clods in gaming history . . . [The game] has no charm, depth, style, or intelligence. But the most galling thing about it is the technical skill with which it's done. The packaging is nice, the manual is readable, and there are no major glitches or bugs. It was clearly executed by thinking human beings, and that is what makes the game's existence so baffling." –The Gaming Intelligence Agency (archive.thegia.com)



Scanfer Publishing LTD

King Arthur's World

PUBLISHER: Jaleco.
DEVELOPER: Argonaut Software.
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

The first SNES cartridge with Dolby Surround sound, *King Arthur's World* plays a lot like *Lemmings*, with players guiding small army guys (barrelmen, engineers, knights, archers, wizards, and dark wizards) through three obstacle-ridden realms (Real World, Goblin Underworld, and Cloud World), keeping Arthur safe along the way. Obstacles include traps, spikes, boiling oil, and the like. Each character type has different skills, such as blowing up ladders and bridges, building catapults and battering rams, casting fireball and stun spells, or firing arrows at such enemies as zombies, mutants, knights, and orcs. The game offers a side-view perspective depicting rich visuals and is compatible with the SNES Mouse, a welcome feature. Fans of *Krusty's Super Fun House* and *The Lost Vikings* should enjoy this game.

Insider Insight:
When I was a kid, I got a Super Nintendo relatively late in its life. I went over to the dark side with the Genesis for a while before getting a SNES around 1995. By then, many players were looking to trade or sell their SNES games so they could upgrade to something new. I lived in Virginia Beach, and at the time there wasn't a huge resale network for games like there is now. In 2017, I can find a GameStop in most every mall with a large majority of its stock being used games. In 1995, this wasn't the case. There were a few shops such as Babbage's and Electronics Boutique that offered used games, but not near the scale in which they are offered today. So, being the broke teenager that I was, I went hunting for SNES carts in the nearby pawn shops around my house.

I would tell my parents I was going to go visit a friend's house for the day, but instead of playing with my buddies I would ride my bike around Virginia Beach, hitting up pawn shop after pawn shop, searching for video game treasures on the cheap. While doing this I collected titles like *Final Fantasy III*, *Contra III*, *Super Metroid*, and *Super Castlevania IV* for $5 to $10 apiece. While the games didn't come with boxes, many times the shop would keep the manuals behind the counter and sell them with the game cart. One of the titles I discovered this way was *King Arthur's World*.

King Arthur's World was unusual because it was one of the few SNES games that could use the mouse for gameplay in place of the standard controller. This gave the cartridge somewhat of a "PC game feel" during a time that personal computers were on the rise. It was also the first title to use Dolby Surround, which was a small step toward better audio experiences on home consoles. The game played a lot like the PC hit *Lemmings* and had the player control soldiers using point-and-click style commands to move from one side of a map to another. Each solider had specific abilities which made them valuable in your quest, so you had to think strategically about which soldier you used and when you used them. It was among the first strategy games on the SNES I played and is still a favorite of mine.

While my professional career in game development has included hits on the Game Boy Advance, the Nintendo DS, and most recently the Wii U, I've never developed a strategy game like *King Arthur's World*. Maybe it's time to bring it back! –Matt Raithel

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

The King of Dragons

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

A beat-'em-up set in the medieval fantasy world of Malus, which features castles, mountains, forests, caves, isles, and the like, *The King of Dragons* boasts five playable characters. The Elf is quick and good with a bow, but weak in close combat. The Fighter wields a sword, while the Cleric fights with a ball-and-chain flail. The Dwarf is small but muscular, dishing out death with his axe. The Wizard is slow and depends solely on magic for attacking the various orcs, goblins, harpies, cyclopes, skeletons, minotaurs, and other creatures (including flying bosses) that populate Malus. Each character can walk, jump, and block attacks, and each can pick up magic orbs scattered about the land. Depending on the type of orb, it will rain down meteors, thunderbolts, or fire walls, or turn your enemies into frogs or jewelry.

You can eat fruit to increase your health and grab gold and jewels to increase your experience point total, an unusual (for this genre), RPG-like trait. If you gain enough experience points, items will appear that increase the level of your weapon or magic. Unlike the SNES version of *Magic Sword*, also by Capcom, *The King of Dragons* maintains its coin-op counterpart's two-player mode (Capcom released *The King of Dragons* to the arcades in 1991). However, it drops the arcade game's three-player option. Yoko Shimomura, the prolific composer who worked on such games as *Breath of Fire*, *Super Mario RPG*, *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga*, and *Kingdom Hearts*, contributed to the soundtrack.

Notable Quotable:

"A lot of what *King of Dragons* offers, for 1994 gaming anyway, sounds great on paper . . . the gameplay just doesn't flow very well . . . Nothing about the graphics or music stands out . . . the controls could have been a whole lot better . . . I'll give the game points for its level designs [which] have a lot of variety and are unpredictable; The challenge is all in the enemy placement instead of level-specified traps." –Game-Cola (gamecola.net)

Insider Insight:

There was a brief period of time in the early '90s when tabletop gaming was almost as big a hobby for me as video games. Nearly every week, my buddies and I would get together around my parents' dining room table and dive into some epic, miniature-fueled RPG action. And eat copious amounts of loaded nachos, but that's another story (thanks, Mom).

Oddly enough, in those days there were precious few video games that actually had a satisfying Tolkien-esque setting and characters. As a result, I was instantly drawn to Capcom's *The King of Dragons*. And man, I played it to absolute death. It was bliss for a kid like me, hacking away against the likes of orcs, skeletons, and, of course, dragons. Capcom had an astonishing amount of game-making magic back then, and *King of Dragons* was a highlight. Excellent graphics and a nice selection of characters to field were the best things about the game, but it had top-notch controls as well, along with a wide breadth of locations to fight in. To me, it was like the world of *D&D* had been digitized, and that was precious indeed.

Capcom also made *Knights of the Round* right around that time, which is a great game as well. Then a few years later, they'd actually produced a few titles based on *D&D* itself. All that came afterwards, though, and it'll always be *King of Dragons* that I remember most fondly. –Jason Micciche

Sheffield Publishing LTD

King of the Monsters

PUBLISHER: Takara.
DEVELOPER: Takara.
GAME TYPE: Fighting/Wrestling, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

In *King of the Monsters*, players select one of four giant creatures: Astro Guy (a superhero who can do a deadly flash wave move), Geon (a Godzilla-like dragon who unleashes a flame crusher), Rockey (a man of stone whose special move is a Rockey bomber), and Beetle Mania (a beetle creature that fires Beetle missiles). After picking their monstrous fighter, players engage in a series of one-on-one battles across four cities: Okayama, Osaka, Kyoto, and Tokyo, each of which has two stages. In addition to punching, kicking, jumping, speed-dashing, and using various wrestling moves against each other (including combos), ultimately trying to pin your foe, you can pick up and throw tanks, battleships, jets, and helicopters. As the fights rage on, buildings, castles, landmarks, historical sites, and the like will be crushed and engulfed in flame, as though you were playing a battle scene in a Godzilla movie.

Unlike the original arcade/Neo Geo version (1991), the SNES port (as well as the Genesis game) does not allow gamers to team up against two computer-controlled creatures. Also, Woo the gorilla and Poison Ghost have been removed as playable fighters, and you can no longer fight in Kobe or Hiroshima. The game is playable in its original form via *SNK Arcade Classics Vol. 1* for the PlayStation 2 and Wii.

Notable Quotable:

"It's hard to rate this game fairly when it has to live up to its Neo Geo counterpart, but on its own, *KOM* is a great attempt with almost all of the action intact. Its only downfalls are that it might be too short and does get a bit repetitive. A solid game at any rate." –*GameFan Magazine* (October 1992)

Insider Insight:
What is it about giant, rubber monsters that is so appealing? My good friends Leann and Larry introduced me to *King of the Monsters* back in my early college days. We'd rent SNK's Neo Geo console from the local video rental store and try to make all our quarters back in savings to cover the weekend rental. Wrestling never entertained me, but the inclusion of monsters, well, that is a different story!

I watched many a Sunday matinee creature feature, and the opportunity to play as a giant lizard or other *Kaiju* (Japanese for strange beasts) was too tempting to pass up. As each city became a fighting ring, I thoroughly enjoyed tearing up Tokyo as a giant beetle, crushing Okayama as a rock monster, and trashing Dragon City as Ultraman-wannabe Astro Guy. What a hoot! There is great joy to be had in grabbing a skyscraper and using it as a colossal bat, all the while knowing full well that the force of Japan's military is powerless to stop you. Furthermore, my pals Leann and Larry never stood a chance! –Michael Thomasson

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

King of the Monsters 2

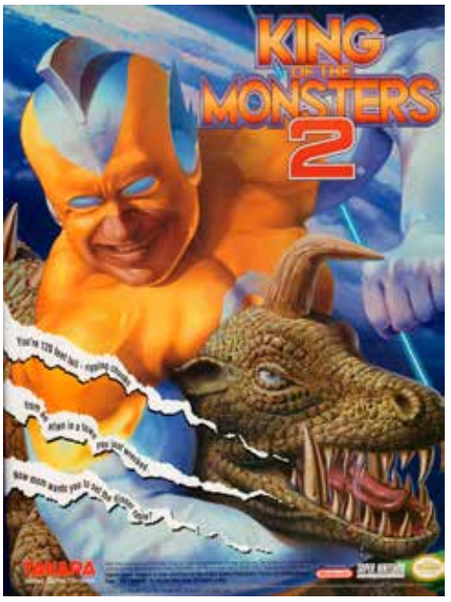
PUBLISHER: Takara.
DEVELOPER: Takara.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Unlike the Genesis port, *King of the Monsters 2* for the Super Nintendo retains the side-scrolling portions of SNK's arcade/Neo Geo game of the same name (1992), making for a more faithfully reproduced conversion. Advanced versions of three of the monsters from the original *King of the Monsters* arcade game—Super Geon (a spiky, mutated Geon), Cyber Woo (a cybernetic version of Woo the gorilla), and Atomic Guy (Astro Guy with bigger muscles and better weaponry)—do battle as heroes in beat-'em-up action, punctuated by fighting game-style battles against bosses Huge Frogger, Eifflelyte, Claw Head, Beetle Master, Aqua Slug, Lavicus, and Famardy. Each playable fighter has an assortment of moves. For example, Super Geon can do a slash attack, tail hammer, body ball bomb, rear drop, and brutal bite, along with three special attacks: snake fire, geo sword, and earthquake.

Locations to battle through include: American City, French City, Grand Canyon, Desert, Sea Bed, Volcano, and Hideout. As you go, you'll be attacked by aliens, jet fighters, bombers, tanks, cannons, and other enemies. Trampling on buildings adds to the fun, and some buildings will reveal power-ups that make your character stronger. Unlike the first *King of the Monsters* for the SNES, this game lets you and a friend team up against the computer.

Notable Quotable:

"It's no classic, but *King of the Monsters 2* is a *heck* of a lot more interesting than the original game. The visuals scream 'arcade!' with their vibrant colors, super-sized creatures, and plentiful eye candy . . . new moves like jump attacks and 'death blows' make the fighting feel less monotonous, and you no longer need to 'pin' your foes (thank goodness). But the most dramatic innovation is the stage designs. Instead of fighting in a small confined area, you forge through the city, prodded by annoying 'Hurry up!' arrows. Destroying buildings is more satisfying because they crumble to the ground in dramatic fashion and release bonus point icons . . . The bosses come in many gruesome varieties, but it takes too long to chip away at their health meters, and that slows the momentum of the game . . . Instead of feeling like a glorified wrestling title, *King of the Monsters 2* has the feel of an over-the-top monster flick, as it should." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)



Sniper Publishing LTD

Kirby Super Star

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Multi-Genre Game, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1996.

Cute and colorful, *Kirby Super Star* contains six full games: Spring Breeze, Dyna Blade, Gourmet Race, Great Cave Offensive, Revenge of Meta Knight, and Milky Way Wishes. Plus, there are two mini-games: Megaton Punch and Samurai King. Players control the puffy pink title character as he runs, jumps, flies, slides, shoots air bullets, swims, fires a water gun, takes elevators, rides hand cars, and battles cute enemies. Swallowing an enemy lets Kirby take on its ability or create a helper, which a second player can control.

There are more than twenty abilities/weapons in all, including cutter (a boomerang-like weapon), sword, cook (a one-shoot ability where Kirby can cook his enemies), and fighter (Kirby can punch and kick). Each ability has several different attack methods, such as dashing while attacking, increasing your attack power. There's lots of side-scrolling platform action, plus some puzzle solving (with levers), racing, fighting, and more. This charming and versatile cartridge is well worth seeking out, especially for Nintendo loyalists. Known as *Kirby's Fun Pak* in Europe and *Hoshi no Kirby Super Deluxe* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"One of the SNES's finest platformers . . . loaded to the brim with content . . . hardly a dull moment to find in any of the games. The graphics are appropriately updated to crisp 16-bit quality, containing individual styles between each game, with the title using impressive scaling effects . . . The series' signature music style and sound effects also carry over to the cart, providing classic and updated audio to flesh out the 'Kirby' experience . . . an example of a title that will satisfy casual players and collectors alike." –Aaron Auzins (*Video Game Collector* #10, Summer 2008)

Insider Insight:

When I was eleven years old, I got into a small argument with my father over what game to buy. I had two glaring choices in front of me. On one side was *Kirby Super Star* with a short pink puff and "8 games in 1" prominently displayed. On the other side, *Judge Dredd* stared at me from behind his sleek mask. I ended up getting *Kirby Super Star*, and I could tell that my dad was disappointed. Luckily, this was the start of a long road that would lead to years of enjoyment.

I loved seeing the pink ball of fluff eating enemies and donning stylish hats to indicate the ability obtained from his impromptu lunch. *Kirby Super Star* also made it very easy to have a second player join in or leave at almost any time, thanks to Kirby being able to convert the abilities he gained into helpers. I would often have a friend over to help me get closer to reaching that one hundred-percent mark. This would continue well into my high school years, where we would challenge each other to the mini-games of Megaton Punch and Samurai Kirby, just to see who would get to control Kirby. This is by far my favorite Kirby game because not only is it nostalgic, it still brings me enjoyment to this day. –Ethan King

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Kirby's Avalanche

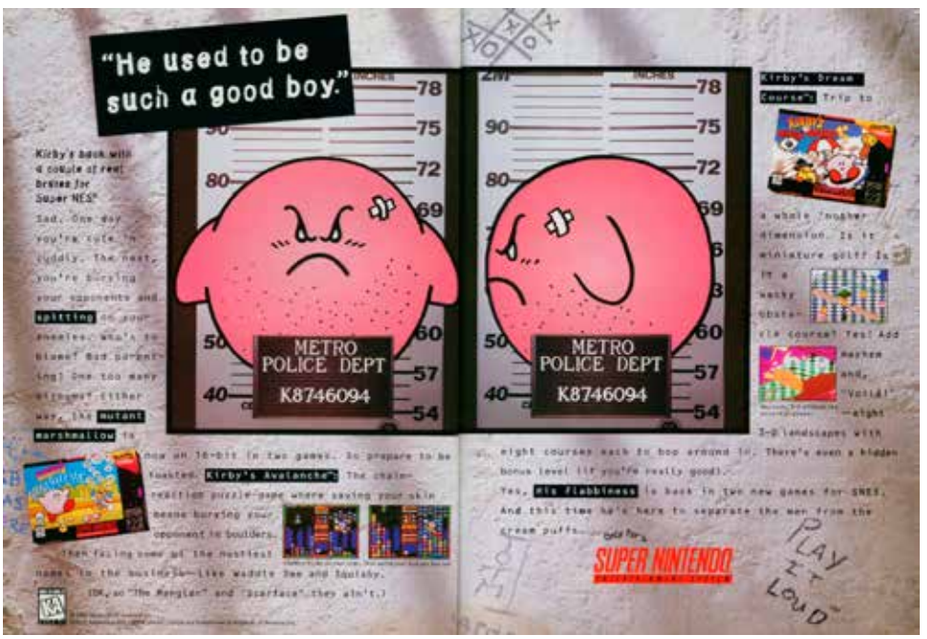
PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory/Compile.
GAME TYPE: Action Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Offering a split-screen view, *Kirby's Avalanche* is an Americanized (make that "Kirby-ized") version of Japan's *Super Puyo Puyo*, the popular puzzler. Players move and rotate pairs of blobs that fall from the sky, lining them up or bunching them together in groupings of four of the same color to make them disappear. The objective is to keep the blobs from piling to the top. Eliminating multiple groupings of blobs with a single pair is a chain reaction, which sends boulders to the other player's (or computer's) playfield, increasing the drama, the strategy, and the challenge. Boulders clog up the playfield and can only be eliminated when blobs adjacent to them are exploded. Just before an avalanche of boulders pours down on you or your opponent, a warning icon will appear.

The blob puzzle pieces are the predominate characters in the game, but there are plenty of other characters in the storyline, including Kirby, who is represented by the player, and his many opponents: Waddle Dee, Bronto Burt, Waddle Doo, Poppy Bros. Sr., Whispy Woods, Kabu, Broom Hatter, and Squishy, among others. Includes digitized speech. This is a fun game, but *Tetris* still rules. Similar to *Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine* (Genesis).

Notable Quotable:

"The game's setup is very simple, making it easy for just about anyone to play. The only rule is that you've got to have a sharp mind that can process quickly. As the levels progress, so does the difficulty and the speed of the falling blobs. That means you only have seconds to place your colors . . . The graphics—for being so minimal—are oddly pleasing . . . The music is generally repetitious but never really grating on the ears; a rubbery base and positive pitch give it a lighthearted, atmospheric tone. There are only a handful of different tunes used in the actual gameplay, so it can get old rather quickly. The music becomes more intense as the player begins to lose a round, however, which adds heavily to the experience. Sounds 'feel good' to hear. Hearing the 'pop' of your blob combos feels rewarding, though some may find the vocal exclamations that tag along with them to be annoying . . . *Kirby's Avalanche* was my very first journey into Kirby's magical world, as well as my first experience with *Puyo Puyo* gameplay. Ever since then, I have loved the style. It just doesn't get old, and it's never 'too easy.' Battling Meta Knight as a kid took me 20+ tries . . . battling him several years later still takes me 20+ tries. Simply put, this game is challenging." –Casey Covel (www.geeksundergrace.com)



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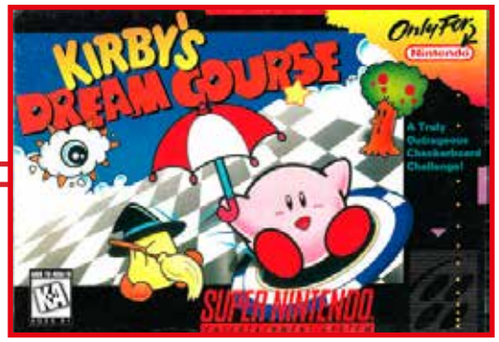
Kirby's Dream Course

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory/ Nintendo EAD.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Miniature Golf/Action, 1 or 2 Players (alternating).
YEAR: 1995.



Starring Nintendo's pink puffball, *Kirby's Dream Course* is a cute, action-oriented miniature golf game enhanced by elements of billiards and platforming. Kirby is the ball, and players must fire him at enemies to uncover each of the game's sixty-four holes (the last enemy within a level transforms into the hole), which are spread over eight isometric courses riddled with such obstacles and features as spinning squares, turntables, warp panels, conveyor belts, and sand bunkers. Defeating certain enemies equips Kirby with special abilities, such as fireball, freeze, spark, hi-jump, tornado, and parasol. Each level has a high-score board, and you can unlock special features (such as alternative versions of the courses) by winning medals. Aiming Kirby and setting the right degree of spin and power level requires strategy and skill, making *Kirby's Dream Course*, which was Nintendo's first foray into miniature golf, a nice challenge. Known as *Kirby Bowl* in Japan.

Fun Fact:
Prior to becoming a "Kirby" game, *Kirby's Dream Course* was originally developed under the title of *Special Tee Shot*. Your character, a red ball with googly eyes, couldn't steal powers from his enemies, but he could acquire power shots, which doubled the strength of the next shot. Although *Special Tee Shot* wasn't released, it was featured in *Nintendo Power* and on the backs of Super NES Control Set boxes. In 2004, a prototype of the game was discovered.

Notable Quotable:
"*Dream Course* is a thinking game just as much as it is action. Lining up the multiple-bank, jumping-floater shot will take some skill and thought. For this reason—and *Dream Course*'s excellent playability—this is one no SNES fan should go without." –*Game Informer* (December 2000)

Notable Quotable:
"Despite its non-traditional nature for a Kirby game, [*Kirby's Dream Course*] still holds onto what made the series so popular in the first place. Our puffball can obtain different abilities from his enemies, and can turn into a U.F.O, grow sharp spikes, or float with the help of an umbrella. He can also do a large variety of moves (jump over obstacles, spin, or bounce), and the player often has to strategically balance strength and spin to achieve the perfect shot. Additionally, before making a shot, the player can even plot his next move and visualize the ideal trajectory!" –Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Notable Quotable:
"While Kirby is better known for his classic side-scrolling adventures, his best game on the SNES was, surprisingly, a golf title of all things. What makes *Kirby's Dream Course* such a dream to play is that the game behaves consistently, something we can't say about other golf games on the system. The physics were by no means realistic, but they did behave logically, which made getting better at the game's six complex courses an enjoyable exercise. The classic Kirby enemies and power-ups sprinkling each stage pushed the game beyond being a simple golf game, and the masterfully crafted stages make *Kirby's Dream Course* both the best golf game on the SNES and the best Kirby game." –Digital Trends (www.digitaltrends.com), which ranked *Kirby's Dream Course* the 23rd best SNES game.

Insider Insight:
When I worked at GameStop in 2013, I had a coworker named Charlie, and every Monday night we closed the store together. We grew close as we had the same tastes in old video games and music. One time we decided to get together at my house for a night of drinking and retro gaming. I had been a retro collector for about three years at this point, so I had a lot of games. We tried to play as many co-op titles as possible, and we were about four beers deep when we decided to play *Kirby's Dream Course*. Neither of us had played it before, but we knew it was multi-player. At first, we had no clue what we were doing. We just continued to tinker around with the controls.

As we continued down our drunken descent of confusion, we started getting competitive. We knew we had to get our Kirbys to a certain platform on the stage and avoid hazards. We played and played, trying to figure out the purpose of the game. By the time we got to the last stage, we had to play against each other. We finally came to the realization that it was a golf game. We felt like such morons.

That last hole got quite competitive once we figured it out. All I can remember is he was about to sink his last shot, and he just missed and hit some kind of tile that ended up switching his Kirby with mine. I hit my Kirby into the final hole and celebrated that I had won. It's a great memory that I'll always cherish. –Raymond Fix

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Kirby's Dream Land 3

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: HAL Laboratory.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1997.

As in the first two games in the series, both of which were on the Game Boy, *Kirby's Dream Land 3* finds the popular pink puffball saving planet PopStar. However, this time Kirby fights alongside Gooey, a character controlled by the computer or a second player. Both heroes can spit out air and water bullets, and both walk, dash, duck, drop, jump, swim, and fly their way through five levels (Grass Land, Ripple Field, Sand Canyon, Cloudy Park, and Iceberg, each comprised of six stages), using a variety of attacks to defeat cutesy enemies. Swallowing an enemy or uniting with a friend—Rick, Kine, and Coo, along with new friends Nago, Chuchu, and Pitch—lets players take on special abilities, such as turning to stone, sticking to ceilings, doing triple jumps, swimming stronger, flying stronger, or spitting out flames. During the journey, you can find such helpful items as Maxim Tomato (recovers vitality), energy drink (partially recovers vitality), invincible candy, 1ups, warp stars (for traveling between levels), and star pieces (thirty grant you an extra life). The series continued with *Kirby 64* (N64), *Kirby's Return to Dream Land* (Wii), and various other offshoots and sequels.

Notable Quotable:

"*Kirby's Dream Land 3* is my favorite game in the franchise . . . Each level has a special task that you may preform: a 'sub-quest' if you will. These tasks vary greatly and include things such as playing mini-games, building sculptures, collecting items, and, in one case, destroying Metroids for Samus! (I promise that is no joke.) While Kirby does not have to perform these tasks, doing so will earn him a collectable called a heart star. If Kirby successfully collects all of the heart stars in a world, he will banish Dark Matter from that section of PopStar upon the defeat of the area boss. Once an area has been cleansed, the boss becomes 'good,' and going to the boss stage only results in the boss standing by a warp star for Kirby to get on. Personally, I love that detail." –Kenny McKee (www.heypoorplayer.com)

Insider Insight:
I was introduced to Kirby at a very young age; his first game was the number one thing I wanted on the Game Boy. Later on, I saw the second game at a friend's house. I didn't know about *Kirby's Dream Land 3* until way later, finding it on a list of every Kirby game. This is mostly due to it coming out on the tail end of the SNES's lifecycle, as many players, including myself, were looking forward to the Nintendo 64. This is sad because *Kirby's Dream Land 3* is one of the best games on the SNES.

Kirby's Dream Land 3 evokes childhood dreams as its graphical style looks like a child drew the characters with colored pencils. It's visually beautiful and has a chipper soundtrack. Kirby brings his animal buddies to the SNES, making for a multitude of abilities to use. Couple this with the simple gameplay that just about anyone can pick up and learn, and the game is one of the most accessible platformers around. This fits the main goal of Masahiro Sakurai and the rest of the team at HAL Laboratory: to make a simple game and character everyone can enjoy. In a world filled with violent experiences getting all the limelight, it's nice to just kick back and return to the imagination of a child with Kirby and his buddies. If I need to relax, this is the game I turn to. –Alex McCumbers

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Knights of the Round

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

A port of Capcom's 1991 arcade game, which was the sequel to *The King of Dragons*, *Knights of the Round* is similar to *Golden Axe* (Genesis), but with better graphics and lesser (though still enjoyable) gameplay. Players assume the role of Lancelot (armed with a sword), Percival (sword), or Arthur (mace), each of whom is ranked according to power, defense, and speed. As you walk, jump, and battle your way through the game, you can grab magic items, including crystal orbs for defeating all onscreen enemies, horse statues for summoning a noble steed to your side, and knight statues for extra lives.

The game also has RPG elements, as you can pick up Merlin's staff for increasing your experience level and treasure chests and silver tea sets for increasing your experience points. Gobbling up roast turkey, fruit platters, salad platters, and milk will refill your health meter. Each player can pull off a special mega crush sword attack, but it decreases your health. The game, which is loosely based on the Arthurian legend, has seven stages: Village on Fire, A Desperate Fight, Battle at the Castle Fort, The Knight's Tournaments, The Expedition, Knights in a Strange Land, and Decisive Battle at the King's Castle. Enemies include soldiers, swordsmen, masked men, birdmen, and barbarians, among others, including bosses.

Notable Quotable:

"*Knights of the Round* may not quite live up to the Final Fight series, but its lush medieval setting is a welcome change from gritty urban streets. The wide variety of moves at your disposal also makes it exciting to play. If you've always wanted to be a knight in shining armor, here's a good place to start." –*Game Players* (May 1994)

Insider Insight:

The Super Nintendo game I have the fondest memories of is *Knights of the Round*. Before my wife and I were married, we used to visit the local arcade for date nights to play pinball and other games—particularly *Knights of the Round*! We tended to enjoy games where we could play together as a team, so we spent many a quarter playing this game and honing our skills. I remember being at our local Toys"R"Us store shopping for a birthday present for my niece when my wife excitedly came running to me with a game ticket (you used to get tickets to buy games and pick up at front of the store). The ticket was for *Knights of the Round*! She took me over to the game aisle and there it was! We purchased it along with a Super Nintendo console, and all our memories of playing the game while we were dating came flooding back. All our old nemeses were there, in particular the Bird Man. His laughing during a fight would make my wife so angry. *Knights of the Round* remains a treasured addition to our SNES library. –William Culver

Limited Run Publishing LTD

Krusty's Super Fun House

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Audiogenic Software.
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle/ Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

Each of the more than sixty levels (spread over five worlds) in *Krusty's Super Fun House*, which is a media-licensed take on *Rat Trap* for the Commodore Amiga, is a rat-infested puzzle with suitably cartoonlike graphics and whimsical music and sound effects to match. To lure the lemming-like pests into deadly traps operated by Bart, Homer, Sideshow Mel, and Corporal Punishment, Krusty must run, jump on platforms, ride moving platforms, and make strategic use of a variety of objects, including blocks (for stair steps or opening secret passageways), super springs (for jumping higher), blowers (for blowing rats around), pipes (straight and angled), jars (for carrying rats), superballs (for knocking down walls), and more. Krusty also throws pies at such enemies as aliens, birds, snakes, and flying pigs. Based on characters from the long-running *The Simpsons* cartoon series (which premiered in 1989), *Krusty's Super Fun House* was also released for the Genesis. The NES version is called *Krusty's Fun House*. Released as *Krusty World* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"From the screenshots, *Krusty's Super Fun House* looks like yet another SNES platform game, but in reality it has a lot more going for it. The graphics are detailed and colorful and move very smoothly, and the fittingly cheesy soundtrack accompanies the game perfectly. All the work that has gone into the presentation pales in comparison to the game itself, however. *Krusty* works as a sort of *Lemmings* in reverse, with the onscreen Krusty acting as guide to the rats. The difficulty level is beautifully graded, so each level gets progressively harder, ranging from really obvious to if-I-don't-complete-this-level-soon-I'm-going-to-go-mad, although the frustration level is surprisingly low, probably thanks to the jolly comedy theme of the game and hilarious background details. Running just a little faster than the still-excellent Megadrive [Genesis] game, *Krusty's Super Fun House* is a truly essential purchase that should take pride of place in your shopping list over the usual tired shoot-'em-ups." –The Mean Machines Archive (www.mean-machinesmag.co.uk)

Scrifter Publishing, LLC

Kyle Petty's No Fear Racing

PUBLISHER: Williams Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Leland Interactive Media.
GAME TYPE: Stock Car Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Endorsed by the NASCAR driver of the title, *Kyle Petty's No Fear Racing* lets you, viewing the action from a slightly elevated perspective behind your car, race on twenty-eight different tracks in Season or Single Race mode. Or, you can build your own tracks using loops, s-curves, hairpin turns, and decals. In Season mode, you compete against other cars on all the tracks, racing to win money to purchase parts to upgrade your car's engine, fuel system, suspension, nitro boosts, transmission, and pit chief. Yes, you will enter pit stops to refuel and change tires, and having a better pit chief makes the process go faster. While driving, you should avoid barriers, oil slicks, and water puddles while making sure to grab dollar signs. Two-player split-screen action lets you and a friend compete in Single Race or Season mode. Selectable difficulty levels include novice, pro, and veteran. The action is loosely based on NASCAR, and it features the likeness of Kyle Petty, but it lacks full NASCAR licensing. Released in Japan as *Circuit USA*.

Fun Fact/Sad Fact:
Kyle Petty is the son of NASCAR legend Richard Petty, the grandson of NASCAR pioneer Lee Petty, and the father of NASCAR driver Adam Petty. Sadly, Adam died in 2000—he was just nineteen years old when he crashed into an outside wall while practicing for the Busch 200 race.

Notable Quotable:
"Even if you can't make it into the pits, you'll have a few pickups lying around the track to help you out, along with things like oil hazards to slow you down. That is, you WOULD be able to use and dodge this stuff if it didn't come up so fast on the screen that you'll never be able to see it before it's right in front of your car. Keep sliding around the track like a madman, and you'll eventually either finish the race or turn the game off in a fit of frustration . . . crappy controls, atrocious graphics, and music so bad that it's actually turned off by default when you start the game . . . your car feels disconnected from the track . . . every track in *No Fear Racing* is the same five or six track segments repeated continuously to give you the illusion of racing around a track. The racing here actually has more in common with a PC game called *Mega Race*, as it used the same idea of moving your car sprite around on top of a pre-rendered track. And while *Mega Race* was just as shallow and boring as *No Fear Racing*, *Mega Race* at least ran decently smooth and looked great for the time . . . every race is insanely repetitive thanks to a framerate so low that it actually caused me to get tunnel vision the second my car started moving . . . the sense of speed is nowhere to be found." –Retro-Vania (www.retrovania.net)

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Lagoon

PUBLISHER: Kemco/Seika.
DEVELOPER: ZOOM.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.

An evil spirit has possessed the water of Lakeland, bringing disease, death, and demon infestation to the formerly peaceful province. As Nasir, Champion of the Light, you must vanquish the evil and restore peace. The top-down action has you exploring the land, talking to other characters, opening treasure chests, wielding magic, attacking enemies with your sword (which makes an unsatisfying pinging sound), and trying to acquire four staffs (earth, sky, star, and moon) and four crystals (fire, wind, water, and thunder), which you can combine to invoke sixteen different spells.

There are five swords you can wield in battle (short, silver, magic, force, and moon blade), but they are all short. Luckily, magic gives you more range. There are also five types of armor (bandit, gold, sonic, thunder, and moon), five different shields (iron, large, great, maxim, and moon), and five different rings (protective, power, defensive, curing, and time, which stops the movement of weaker enemies) you can grab. Unlike most games of this type, your character can jump over gaps and other obstacles. Boss battles are tough (leveling up helps), and it's easy to get lost in certain areas. Visually, the bosses are the best part of the game. *Lagoon* is similar to *Y's The Vanished Omens* (Master System), but is not as well-loved.

Notable Quotable:

"*Lagoon* is, at best, vaguely interesting. The game lacks excitement and is little more than a poor translation of NEC's *Ys Book I & II*. Both the sound and graphics seem rather bland. The gameplay is okay, and some of the scenes in Phillip Castle give a very nice sense of depth with smooth, multi-speed scrolling. The characters are larger than they are in *Ys* as well. On the whole, however, I would suggest this game only to *Ys Book I & II* lovers who either have very poor vision or a very small TV." –*Game Zero* (May 1992)

Insider Insight:

Released just four months after the launch of the SNES in North America, this not-so-well-known, overhead hack-'n'-slash RPG has the privilege of being the first of its genre for the SNES, released well before *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* and *Legend of Mana*. I was excited to get a *Zelda*-style game on my shiny new SNES back in the day, and it looked like Kemco was about to deliver. And, oh boy, did they—but not in a good way! If you were looking for a fun, action-packed, adventure-laden, adrenalin pumping RPG, then sadly we had to wait another year for *A Link to the Past* to be released.

What we got in *Lagoon* was the first of many shockingly low-budget SNES titles commanding AAA game prices. *Lagoon* suffers from unpolished, subpar graphics, collision detection issues, boring dungeons, and music and certain sound effects that don't quite convey the appropriate mood. Moreover, the game is lacking in the fun department. My brother and I forced ourselves to play it numerous times after quickly realizing what a mess it was.

Never before had I seen a game that looked like pure fun from the magazine articles go so far astray in execution. As a budding game developer on the Amiga computer at the time, I took away several valuable lessons from *Lagoon*, mainly in the "what not to do" category when programming a game. The single biggest issue is how ridiculously close you must be to an enemy in order to damage it. You must be within three or four pixels, resulting in you almost always taking damage during battle, even from the easiest of enemies. The greatest challenge this game presented was the sheer willpower it took for me not to toss it out the window.

Despite all its flaws, *Lagoon* would be at least marginally playable if not for that one weapons-collision flaw. I could overlook the other issues if it at least felt like *Zelda* during battle and not as if you were trying to poke the bad guys with a fork. –Russ Kumro

Schiffer Publishing, LTD.

Lamborghini American Challenge

PUBLISHER: Titus.
DEVELOPER: Titus.
GAME TYPE: Sports Car Racing/Light Gun Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

In *Lamborghini American Challenge*, you break the law by racing your Lamborghini Diablo on public roads. If a cop catches you speeding, you could incur a fine. Fortunately, winning and gambling on races lets you purchase a radar detector and super brakes. You can also stop in the garage to purchase repairs, a turbo-boost, super tires for dry and rainy weather, snow tires for icy climates, various five-speed and six-speed transmissions, infrared goggles for seeing in the dark, a radar jammer, a roadster for better control and resistance, and an assortment of speed power-ups. Before the game begins, you can select from several different drivers, each ranked by name, number of races won, number of points, and top speed. You'll compete against eighteen professional drivers in nine races, and you can push rival cars off the road. A split-screen versus mode lets you compete in one, five, seven, or nine races.

Another mode of play supports the Super Scope light rifle. In the one-player game, you must aim the gun to steer your car or let the computer take the wheel while you control firing. Two-player action lets one player steer using the control pad while the other takes pot shots at enemy cars. The Super NES Mouse is supported as well. Your view in the game is from behind your car, and the twisting, turning, high-octane action takes place in a variety of areas, including mountain roads, the desert, and urban settings. An energetic jazz fusion score plays during races. Also released for the Game Boy.

Fun Fact:
The Lamborghini car company, located in a small Italian village called Sant'Agata Bolognese (near Bologna), is named after Ferruccio Lamborghini (1916–1993). He founded the company in 1963, when he was forty-seven years old. Prior to that, he was a successful tractor manufacturer with a sideline interest in sports cars. The fastest Lamborghinis can go approximately 370 miles per hour.

Notable Quotable:
"A very attractive Super NES racing game with loads of variety and a host of useful options. The decidedly odd Super Scope option adds an extra dimension." –*Total!* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"*Lamborghini American Challenge* is immaculately presented, playable but nothing too new, and the Super Scope bits are fun in the short term, but the monotonous tunes did my head in. Altogether this makes for a varied cart that would've been excellent but for the unresponsive steering and lack of features in the blasting; it gives the impression the Super Scope was remembered last minute and hastily added for extra appeal." –*SNES Force* (December 1993)

Archer Publishing LTD

Last Action Hero

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Bits Studios.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Starring Arnold Schwarzenegger as Jack Slater, the movie *Last Action Hero* (1993), in which young film fan Danny is transported into the world of his favorite movie star, was widely panned by critics. However, it's easily better than the SNES cartridge it inspired, thanks to the game's repetitious gameplay, sluggish controls, lousy graphics, and predictable enemies. Players guide Slater as he walks and jumps (he can crouch as well) his way through New York City neighborhoods, battling such enemies as bomb-hurling street punks, knife-wielding gang members, hard-driving thugs, and machine gun-wielding Mafiosos. Some enemies carry baseball bats. There are no continues, weapon pick-ups, or other such flourishes, but there are a couple of left-to-right driving areas in which Slater must run down mobsters while dodging barriers, manholes, double-parked cars, and other obstacles.

The game has seven levels of play: Action Hero Movie, Bonneville Car Chase (which includes ramp jumping and driving between semi-trucks), Leo's Funeral (battle thugs, ride a glass elevator to the roof of a high-rise building), The Car Chase, Premiere Night (battle Benedict's henchmen in the Projection Room, Film Store, and Manager's Office), On the Roof with the Ripper (where the enemy does super leaping attacks), and The Finale (where Benedict fires projector-propelled energy beams). The NES version lacks the driving levels. Also released for the Genesis. The Game Boy and Game Gear versions are much different. A Sega CD version was announced but never commercially released.

Notable Quotable:

"This film will be remembered that you can do action, adventure, and dramatic scenes like that with chase scenes and blowups and special effects without really making it hard R rated, making it PG-13, so the kids can also go and see it. The whole family can go and see it. You don't need the explicit violence in order to tell a story and make a great movie." –Arnold Schwarzenegger, speaking to CNN at the *Last Action Hero* movie premiere in Los Angeles.

Notable Quotable:

"I use the term 'beat-'em-up' loosely because there's really only one attack you need to use. It's not even a combination—it's just a straight right jab that he throws over and over and over again. 'Arnold' can also do this spinning kick, but there's no point because it takes a lot longer to execute this attack,

and the longer an attack takes, the more time enemies have to hit you . . . a travesty of a game . . . for how stupid the combat is, the game is still pretty hard because of how many enemies there are . . . it slowly whittles down your life bar . . . the most hilariously broken part of the combat is when you and the enemy occupy relatively the same space, and you're punching at air. If you and the enemy are right next to each other, the enemy is swinging at nothing, and you're punching at nothing . . . the sound the cars make when they crash into each other sound like a squeaky toy my puppy has." –stanburdman (YouTube)

Sniper Publishing

The Lawnmower Man

PUBLISHER: THQ Software.
DEVELOPER: The Sales Curve.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/First-Person Shooter/Third-Person Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Loosely based on the 1992 feature film, which starred Jeff Fahey and Pierce Brosnan, *The Lawnmower Man* takes place in a virtual world of sorts, with players engaging in four types of gameplay. The platform shooter areas consist of running and jumping on buildings, shooting such enemies as cars and guards, dodging enemy fire and other obstacles (including soda cans and psychic furniture), and grabbing and using homing bullets, smart bombs, and other power-ups.

The virtual reality sections are viewed from a first-person perspective (only the player's gloves are visible) as gamers fly through portals, avoiding walls and other obstacles. During certain virtual reality areas, players are armed with a gun for shooting enemies, hexagons, and other obstacles. There are also third-person areas in which players view their flying character from behind as he shoots enemies and avoids such obstacles as columns, shapes, and walls. Levels include: Suburbia, The Cyber Run, VSI Warehouse, Cyberjobe, Post-Apocalypse Suburbia, Cyber Tube, The Shop, and Doomplayer. Also released for the Genesis and Game Boy. The Sega CD version, with its mini-games and interactive movie elements, is much different.

Fun Fact:
Stephen King successfully sued the producers and distributors of *The Lawnmower Man* movie for attaching his name to the film, which had very little to do with King's short story of the same title.

Notable Quotable:
"There's nothing original in this game in terms of mechanics. It's a bizarre mix of genres and ideas from games ranging from *Contra* to *Sonic the Hedgehog* to *Star Fox* to *Wolfenstein 3D*. But it mixes all of these into a game that actually has a satisfying variety of gameplay . . . the side-scrolling sections had hidden areas and other aspects that you needed to explore. It was required, actually. If you didn't find all the terminals in the game, you got the crappy ending . . . Yes, this is a game for the SNES in 1993, that had alternate endings . . . No section of the game goes on long enough to wear out its welcome, making it entertainingly bite-sized while also possessed of an unforgiving difficulty." –Dan Seitz (uproxx.com)

Notable Quotable:
"You read the story, you saw the movie, now you can play the game. Set aside the fact that none of these have even a remote correlation to each other, and come to grips with the reality that THQ has actually come out with a decent game, perhaps even good. Combine basic run-jump-and-shoot side-scrolling fare with *HyperZone*-but-better first-person perspective, and you have a truly entertaining cart. Although graphically a bit on the 'smallish' side, visually *The Lawnmower Man* delivers, particularly the pseudo-VR scenes. Excellent sound, responsive controls (although sometimes restrictive), and two-player simultaneous action come together for a game I surprise myself with by recommending." –Sean Pettibone (*GEA News* #1 fanzine, October 1993)

Insider Insight:
I realize that I am probably alone in this, but I've always felt that Sales Curve's *The Lawnmower Man* was an underrated Super Nintendo game. Sure, on the surface it looks like a *Contra* knockoff, but it is much, much more than that. Where it lacks originality in its side-scrolling action levels (which are fun, regardless), it more than makes up for it in the 3D bits that take full advantage of the SNES's Mode 7. When I first played the game I was completely blown away by these levels as I had never seen anything quite like them before. They are fast and twitchy, requiring steady hands to not crash into everything rushing at you. And I have to bring up the awesome music by Allister Brimble—pure '90s techno cheesy awesomeness, which sums up this game pretty nicely. Give it a chance, and you might end up agreeing with me. –Christopher Pico

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Legend

PUBLISHER: Seika.
DEVELOPER: Arcade Zone.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

The Kingdom of Sellech is being threatened by Clovis, the corrupt son of the King of Sellech. He wants to harness the evil power of Beldor, who reigned as a despot over Sellech for a thousand years before his defeat at the hands of bold knights. To stop Clovis, you, as a musclebound knight outfitted with a sword, must make your way through such areas as caverns, forests, a temple, and a mill, battling swordsmen, mages, bats, dogs, swamp creatures, cavemen, and other enemies along the way. In addition to hacking and slashing with your sword, you can do jump-kicks, execute jump-sword attacks, unleash a magic spell attack, and block with a shield.

During your journey, you'll find a number of helpful items, including: apples, drumsticks, and bread for replenishing energy; gold bags and coins for extra points; "extra force" icons to increase your power; and phials for using magic (two are needed to activate your magic spell—you can carry up to nine at once). Magic spells are especially useful during boss battles. In addition to the standard gameplay, there are also two types of bonus stages: collect as many gold coins as possible, and use keys you have collected during the game to open chests and take the bonus items in them. Interestingly, the bonus stages are skippable. You can outfit your knight in one of three different colors, and a second gamer can join in for co-op action. *Legend* is similar to *Final Fight* and *Golden Axe*, but is slower and not as critically acclaimed or as well-known.

Notable Quotable:

"We were very satisfied with it. We wanted more speed in the animations, but that was tied to the hardware limitations of the Super Nintendo. However, we were delighted with the result. We told ourselves that for a first attempt with a beat-'em-up game, we did pretty well. Perhaps our nicest memory comes from the CES: We were showcasing *Legend*, and people from Capcom were showcasing *King of Dragons*, so having them come to us and look at our game was the greatest of all satisfactions." –Arcade Zone's Carlo Perconti (via www.1up-games.com), who developed the game with Lyes Belaidouni.

Insider Insight:
I have a strange history with Seika's *Legend*. It was released in 1993, but I have little recollection of it from back then. I imagine I played it quite a bit, though, given that I was into sword and sorcery stuff, and that's what *Legend* plays off of.

My interest in *Legend* was rekindled in 2016 at a gaming convention, where I saw people playing the game at a booth on the show floor. The booth's manager was stunned that I remembered it. Apparently, it's a game that few people recall and even fewer people have in their libraries. After I played it for a while, I was positive that I had a copy. And when I got home, the first thing I did was scan my shelves. Of course, there it was, just as I'd thought. But I know what you're thinking: "So, it's kind of rare—but is it GOOD?"

The answer is, "sort of."

Legend is one of those SNES titles that gets the highlights right. It's really good-looking, it has solid controls, and it's fairly imaginative (you actually have to fight a tree at one point, for example). But there's a problem, and it's a common one from the era—it's darn tough on its players. Enemies swarm around you from all sides, but that's not the worst of it. The game makes you start the level over if you have to continue. That would be unacceptable today, and honestly it kinda was in the 16-bit era, too. And yet, here we are. Still, restart warts and all, *Legend* is like a rediscovered relic for me. One that's pretty darn fun . . . until you hit that first 'continue,' anyway. –Jason Micciche

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

The Legend of the Mystical Ninja

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Adventure/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

As Kid Ying, a mystical ninja, or Dr. Yang, his mentor and keeper of mystical secrets, you will journey through islands, castle fortresses, amusement parks, and mountain villages of Japan, battling enemies who are being controlled by the Silver Serpent, the Dragonbeast's "right-claw man." You can walk, jump, crawl, climb up and down ladders, and use such weapons as "not so peaceful" pipes, lethal coins, yo-yos, bombs, flutes, party whistles, and shooting stars. When you strike an enemy, he or she will make a funny face, and there's other humor as well. Defeated enemies also release money and other items. Most of the game's ten levels are divided into: Warlock Zone I, where you battle enemies, gather clues, learn new fighting techniques, and enter shops and restaurants to purchase items; and Warlock Zone II, where you'll use what you've learned to progress and implement your new attack skills to defeat more powerful enemies.

The graphics are colorful and detailed, and the characters are small, cute, and clearly influenced by anime. The action is diverse, with adventure areas, side-scrolling scenes, top-down stages, and lots of mini-games, including dice, horseracing, quiz, whack-a–mole, snake, ring toss, matching, a *Breakout* clone, and, interestingly enough, the classic side-scrolling shooter, *Gradius*. The game really shines in two-player mode, where you can ride piggy back on the other character to help navigate tough platforms and avoid getting stuck on scrolling screens. This fun, musically and graphically rich game holds up remarkably well but for one thing: long, unwieldly passwords for saving progress. Known as *Ganbare Goemon: Yukihime Kyūshutsu Emaki* in Japan, *The Legend of the Mystical Ninja* introduced Goemon to the U.S.

Insider Insight:
Konami shaped many of my early memories of the Super Nintendo. *Legend of the Mystical Ninja* was one of those games that looked so weird that only a major third-party like Konami or Capcom could have possibly released it in North America and seen any sort of success. The game is a classic—one of the earliest examples of spectacular simultaneous multiplayer action on the system. I loved how unapologetically weird and Japanese it was. You didn't see a lot of stuff like this localized back in the early '90s. The game really reminded me of all the things I loved about *River City Ransom* on the NES. Exploring each building in town lead to so many cool little discoveries, like a bath house, an arcade, or just a place to buy some food. It's a crying shame more of the sequels didn't make it stateside. I absolutely adored *Legend of the Mystical Ninja*. –Greg Sewart

Insider Insight:
I didn't actually get an SNES until 1997 or so, but this was the best time to get into it since by this time everyone was trading in their old cartridges, and stock was both cheap and plentiful. It was during this time when I discovered *The Legend of the Mystical Ninja*, one of the lesser-known classics from Konami. In its native country, where the series is called "Ganbare Goemon," it was actually more common than *Castlevania* or *Contra*. But it's heavily rooted in Japanese culture, plus its sense of humor is very strange, so this type of game was typically passed over for English release. Nonetheless, it was great Konami took a chance on the game and kept most of its Japanese-ness intact, despite the misguided cover art and changing the names of the heroes, Goemon and Ebisumaru, into Kid Ying and Dr. Yang, respectively.

Beyond its characters and setting, *Mystical Ninja* is also atypical for a platformer because you spend a lot of time running around towns, bashing enemies to get gold, which in turn is used to buy equipment and curatives. The closest point of comparison at the time was Technos' *River City Ransom*, which hadn't obtained the cult classic status it holds today. It's also filled with tons of mini-games and little things to mess around with, including a replication of the first stage of Konami's classic shooter, *Gradius*.

This is actually the first of four Goemon titles released for Nintendo's 16-bit platform—it must not have been too successful since Konami didn't localize the later ones, and only briefly resurrected the brand in the Nintendo 64 era. I was so entranced with its goofiness that it was one of the major reasons (along with *TwinBee*, another Konami property) that convinced me to pull the tabs out of my SNES' cartridge slot, hit up eBay, and start importing Super Famicom games. –Kurt Kalata

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

The Legend of Zelda:
A Link to the Past

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

A menacing magician has taken over the land of Hyrule in *A Link to the Past*, the third game in the popular Legend of Zelda series. Once again, players guide sword- and shield-wielding elfin hero Link through dungeons, mazes, palaces, forests, caves, and the like, battling monsters, solving puzzles, avoiding traps, and rescuing Princess Zelda. The combat is action-heavy (as opposed to turn-based), with Link swinging his sword at the press of a button or, for a more powerful whirling attack, spinning by you holding down the button until it's charged. Link can also throw boulders at enemies, do a dashing attack (when you have the Pegasus Shoes), and unleash a beam attack (when your sword's power is level two or more and all your heart containers are full).

The overhead view action of the original *The Legend of Zelda* for the NES returns (the side-view of *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link* was an anomaly), but new items have been added, including a power glove and Titan's mitt (for lifting rocks and other heavy objects), a grappling hook, Zora's flippers (for swimming), and a magic mirror that will teleport you to the Dark World, which is a darkened mirror world of Hyrule.

You'll perform numerous tasks in this game, including talking to villagers, throwing bombs, battling a cyclops with a bow and arrows, using keys to open doors and treasure chests, cutting down bushes to reveal rupees (currency) and hearts (health), pushing and pulling blocks and stone statues to solve puzzles, and much more. Epic gameplay, elegant visuals, and a rousing musical score make *A Link to the Past* one of the greatest video games ever made. Followed by *The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening* (Game Boy), *The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening DX* (Game Boy Color), *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64), *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (Nintendo 64), and numerous other sequels, including a direct successor, *The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds* (3DS).

Notable Quotable:

"Few video game series carry the reverence the video game industry holds for The Legend of Zelda. With the sole exception of the Super Mario games, no other series produces such consistently great games . . . There are points to be made for which Zelda game is best today, but for a long time, *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* was the pinnacle of the series . . . *A Link to the Past* was, and is, such a beloved game because of the attention it gave to gameplay. Sure, it was the genesis for the entire Zelda mythos, introducing concepts like the Sages, the Dark World, and numerous other narrative devices—all of which have been further explored and expanded in later games—but *A Link to the Past* was first and foremost about the adventure at hand. Exploring the expansive lands of Hyrule and the Dark World felt exciting, as they were packed to the brim with secrets waiting to be uncovered. Moments like stumbling across a mysterious cave entrance brought a rush of excitement as you pondered what sort of secrets could be hidden inside

"The dungeons were challenging but fair, and collecting the special items and weapons hidden within each transformed Link from a green-horned (and green-garbed) adventurer into an unstoppable warrior. However, unlike other games that tend to focus on the sense of power and act of destruction, *A Link to the Past* never felt gratuitous or aggressive in its violence . . . combat was always secondary to exploration and puzzle solving. These days, video games rely on the power fantasy to make players feel important, but *A Link to the Past* made you feel important in the way it gave you free reign to explore all of Hyrule. It's a testament to *A Link to the Past*—and really all games in the Legend of Zelda series—that the game could create a sense of power and progression, yet remain so childlike in the sense of curiosity and wonder it instilled in players." –Digital Trends (www.digitaltrends.com), which ranked *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* the 2nd best SNES game (behind *Super Metroid*).

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Insider Insight:
The concept of parallel universes and other sci-fi or paranormal ideas fascinated me when I was a kid. Tie that into one of my favorite video game franchises, and I was enamored. *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* allowed me to realize both my love of fantasy adventure and epic storytelling through gaming. While playing the game, I felt like I was not just experiencing Hyrule and its forests, castles, and dungeons, but building them as well. Through projecting myself onto Link, I was on a creative journey, only bound by the corners of the TV screen. Yes, the plot is written out for you, but the story and its environments were so rich that in-game choices weighed heavy on my mind, and non-playable characters, depending on their role, became my neighbors or despised enemies. The introduction of the Dark World further spurred my creativity, as I saw myself battling through to Ganon, the monstrous wizard.

The game reminded me of my favorite books at the time, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*; everything is curious on the other side of the mirror, and, like Alice, Link must battle to make it right again. The Zelda series grounds this fantasy world into reality through gameplay, and it's an adventure that continues enchanting a new generation of gamers—I can't wait to introduce my niece to the series. –Erin Hawley

Insider Insight:
I have many memories of playing games for the Atari 2600, NES, and Genesis, mostly with others. From *Grand Prix* to *Contra* to *Altered Beast*, nothing was quite as much fun as having a buddy come over and play until somebody's mother decided it was time for dinner. Nothing that is, except for *Zelda*. The first installment for the NES was a single-player game, but for many it likely also involved someone to draw maps, remember secret locations, and furiously flip through pages of *Nintendo Power* for the smallest clue that might indicate which wall to bomb.

But *A Link to the Past* was different. The atmosphere at the beginning of the game set the mood; I remember how dark the game felt from the beginning, with rain and lightning and a helpless kid waking suddenly from bed to find himself alone. And, unlike its predecessor, it had some sense of direction that didn't require a copilot that had walked down that path before. The game was more intricate, but more intuitive as a sense of direction had been artfully woven into every riddle and dungeon. The world was enormous and inspired a sense of awe.

And then I turned into a bunny! It didn't fully sink in what had happened, but as I realized the game had just doubled in size, I was absolutely thrilled. And this new half of the game, the Dark World, was much more dangerous and foreboding; I honestly felt as if I just received an entirely new game for free. And the ending offered a hard-fought sense of accomplishment.

I've played thousands of games, from the absolute worst to some true masterpieces, but there are few that come close to the quality of this one. Easily the best video game of all time, at least in my opinion, this cartridge makes me feel exactly as I did the first time I played it, every time I play it. It is, after all, a "link to the past." –Andy Slaven

Insider Insight:
What can you say about the Legend of Zelda series that hasn't already been said? The Library of Alexandria couldn't contain all of the praise Link's adventures have gotten over the years. But here's the thing: The franchise deserves every single word. If not for Mario, Zelda would be Nintendo's most iconic property and for good reason. This series has consistently given us one epic adventure after another, and each entry is filled with some of my greatest video game memories.

I first encountered *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, which remains one of the best games in the series, at a neighbor's house. It was one of the first games I played where I felt like I was exploring a truly open world, filled with adventure around every corner. I didn't even have an SNES yet, so I was soon staying over at my friend's house a lot. Sometimes I would come over when he wasn't home or continue playing in the basement even after he'd been called up for dinner. I couldn't resist *A Link to the Past*'s call to save the princess and vanquish that evil pig, Ganon. Most of today's games are a lot flashier, but few of them have the same spark of magic that was locked away inside *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*. –Benjamin Reeves

Insider Insight:
The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past was a game changer, just as much as its two predecessors were, starting with 1987's *The Legend of Zelda* and 1988's *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link*. Whether that be the necessity of making precise maps of the Dungeons of Hyrule in the first game or coming to terms with the side-scrolling aspects of *The Adventure of Link*, each Zelda title has managed to successfully bring something new and magical to the table, which is why it will always be one of my favorite series.

I believe nothing gaming related will ever beat my memories of playing *A Link to the Past*. I was a fan of early adventure games and role-playing titles on my beloved Commodore 64, such as *Ultima* and *The Bard's Tale*. So the Zelda games hooked me hard, and thankfully they had the same effect on my grandmother, who has always been a kid at heart. So beginning with the Atari VCS and right up until Nintendo's release of the GameCube, there were countless days where we sat in the middle of the living room floor, too close to the television, visiting places like Hyrule together.

With *A Link to the Past*, we found ourselves contending with the expanded functions of the controller as well as the new elements of the game itself, such as the dashing attack of the Pegasus boots or spin attack, not to mention wrapping our heads around the idea of switching between the Light and Dark Worlds—areas closed off in one might be open in the other. The game had delightfully devious puzzles that required a lot of note-taking and sharing of information—a must back in 1992, as the internet wasn't readily there with the answers.

From my early days of adventure gaming, including the Zelda series, my grandmother sort of became the unofficial cartographer of our duo. She recorded every bit of dialogue that seemed to be of interest in a notebook, which of course also contained our detailed maps. We worked on *A Link to the Past* in shifts—she had her own game-save that she would play when I would go home, making sure to update the notebook if she discovered something I might have missed. When I finally defeated Ganon, it was truly a family effort, which for me is one of the reasons that after twenty-five years, *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* remains a high point of gaming. –Larry Luper Jr.

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Lemmings

PUBLISHER: SunSoft.
DEVELOPER: Psygnosis.
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle, 1 or 2 Players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.

A nice rendition of the oft-ported computer game, *Lemmings* for the Super Nintendo offers 125 levels of fun puzzle action (as opposed to 120 in most versions and one hundred in the NES game), including canyons, fires, tunnels, and ancient ruins. On each screen, players must use a cursor to guide the titular rodents, who are known for walking off cliffs, drowning, and wandering aimlessly into dangerous passageways, safely to their goal within a given time limit. The key to victory is strategically assigning specific tasks to the lemmings, such as digging, climbing, blocking other lemmings, building bridges, and blowing holes through obstacles.

A two-player competitive split-screen mode is available, in which the player on the left must protect the blue-clothed lemmings while the player on the right saves the green-clothed lemmings, giving the game virtually limitless replay value. Unfortunately, the cartridge is not compatible with Nintendo's Super NES Mouse, meaning computer versions of the game have superior controls (though this shouldn't keep you from playing). Four difficulty levels are available, as is an indispensable password system for saving progress. Also released for the Game Gear, NES, 3DO, DS, and numerous other consoles.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics aren't really up to much, but the animation is superb. Sound-wise, this knocks spots off the Amiga version, with brilliant tunes playing on every level. As far as gameplay goes, this is faultless. It's easier to get into than the Amiga version and harder to get out of. It's not difficult to find yourself playing at three o'clock in the morning, trying to get past that particularly nasty level. There are so many tricks and surprises in this game, it's a joy to behold. There are only two really essential purchases on the SNES, *Super Mario World* and now *Lemmings*. What more can I say? Buy it!" –*Computer and Video Games* (March 1992)

Insider Insight:

I didn't have much access to PC games at the time, so a game where I told characters what to do instead of pressing a button to make them jump was an entirely new concept to me. While *Lemmings* was really fun to play, I was particularly enthralled by the music and the visuals. The way the lemmings' hair shifted as they moved, the extraordinary flamethrower effects, the boiling acid—it was all so fluidly animated.

The music sounded unique, especially coming off the 8-bit era. The instruments straddle the line between goofy and beautiful, which leads to some really memorable stuff. I specifically remember renting this game during a rainy weekend, and the combination of the fluid animation, laid back music, and rain outside my window put me in one of the most relaxed states I can ever remember being in. On the other hand, perhaps the most memorable thing about *Lemmings* was the hilarious death sequences. Who can forget the first time they see hundreds of lemmings grab their heads, shout "Oh no!" and explode? –Kris Randazzo

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Lemmings 2: *The Tribes*

PUBLISHER: Psygnosis.
DEVELOPER: DMA Design.
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

In *Lemmings 2*, the loveable, green-haired creatures have split into twelve distinct tribes: Beach, Outdoor, Egyptian, Medieval, Classic, Circus, Highland, Polar, Space, Cavelem, Shadow, and Sports. Players must complete ten levels for each tribe, and, unlike the first game, gamers are rewarded for guiding as many Lemmings to the exit as possible. As in the original game, players assign skills to the mindlessly moving Lemmings to help them avoid traps and obstacles and reach the exit. However, there are many more skills this time (more than sixty in all), including wind (twister, surfer, hang glider), ground removing (club basher, miner, flamethrower), ground adding (builder, sand pourer, planter), shooting (spearer, mortar, roper), and moving (jumper, skater, swimmer). Battery backup (as opposed to passwords) saves progress, but there is no two-player mode. Like the PC version, the SNES game offers mouse support for smoother control than the Genesis cartridge. Followed by such sequels as *Lemmings 3D* and *Lemmings & Oh No! More Lemmings* for the PlayStation.

Notable Quotable:

"*Lemmings 2* was a different beast, the tech was much more complex, but designed to make console versions much better. I think it had too many skills, but the underlying tech was great. I was given the SNES version to do, and it was one of the most complex games I've had to write. Some complex internals that had to run quick on a 3.5 mhz chip. Tricky stuff—but fun!" –Former DMA Design programmer Mike Dailly (via readonlymemory.vg)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are the same as they ever were, simplistic but functional. The gameplay is about the same: entertaining and different. If you're a fan of the original game, *Lemmings 2* is a worthy sequel. If you've never tried it before and are a fan of strategy-type games, you'll dig it." –*Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (March 1995)

Notable Quotable:

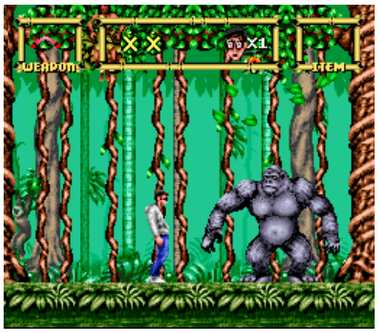
"So much time has passed that I'm not sure if my opinions about *Lemmings 2* are contrary or against the grain. I didn't like it, having loved the original, which was the perfect blend of challenging puzzles and comic characters; I found the Tribes' larger skillset upset the sense of progression horribly. In the original *Lemmings*, you move from level

to level, getting a better appreciation as to how the few skills at your disposal can be used in different situations. In *Lemmings 2*, each of the twelve titular tribes has its own set of skills and ten levels in which to utilize them. While some of the skills are repeated, with slightly different animations, the levels are built to accommodate a tribe's specialism. On paper, it's a sound idea, but in practice it left me cold. You can play any set of levels in any order, and the fine difficulty curve of the original game is lost. I'm also much more attached to the minimalist lemmings of the original than any of the daft spin-offs." –Adam Smith (www.rockpapershotgun.com)

Fifer Publishing LTD

Lester the Unlikely

PUBLISHER: DTMC, Inc.
DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.



Instead of putting you in the role of a fantasy hero, a secret agent, or a super-powered cool guy, *Lester the Unlikely* has you controlling a bespectacled, comic book-reading nerd. Lester is stranded on a tropical island and must journey through such locations as the beach, jungles, a village, a ship, and an underworld. He can walk, jump, climb, crouch, ride rafts, swing on vines, enter doorways, and solve puzzles, such as moving boulders to gain access to high areas. At various points, he can wield a sword and find and throw rocks and boomerangs. When weaponless, Lester can kick enemies, but this is a weak maneuver. Enemies and obstacles to overcome include crabs, seagulls, piranhas, spiders, leopards, bats, villagers, spears, dripping acid, fire, water, spikes, rolling barrels, lava, dynamite, poison darts, and more.

Rotoscoped graphics make our geeky hero smoothly animated, and he begins the game acting cowardly, gaining courage as he goes, which is a neat, potential-filled concept. Unfortunately, terrible controls, dull action, blind jumps, and other flaws ruin the experience—imagine an awful *Prince of Persia*. This game should be called "Lester the Unlikable."

Insider Insight:
Lester the Unlikely is one of the hardest-to-control SNES games of all-time. If you've played it before, you know what I'm saying. But there was just something about it that made me enjoy it. Where else could you play as the stereotypical nerd, one that can't even see a turtle without running away? This was the first time I remember the "hero" of a video game being a complete loser, and I thought it was interesting. The game also featured some neat rotoscope animation that was similar to games like *Prince of Persia*, and at the time I thought this was cool. The game made me forget everything I ever thought I knew about platforming because it was super challenging. I lost many hairs from pulling them out due to the cheap deaths. –Eric Perez

Insider Insight:
Back in the 1990s, one of my close friends got a Super Nintendo, along with the usual titles like *Donkey Kong Country*, *Super Mario World*, and *The Jungle Book*. One day he told me he had a new game. The first words out of my mouth were, "What's the name?" He smiled and said, "Just take a look at the game. Any more, and it will spoil the surprise." I was in for quite a shock. The title screen proclaimed "Lester the Unlikely," with Lester swinging on an endless vine through the jungle. I looked at my friend and he started laughing. As I dove into the game, I quickly got the premise: nerd goes on adventure with all the drawbacks—easily frightened, very little strength, and a penchant for screaming. Check, check, and double check. The game is a platformer, and Lester actually screams when he comes into contact with enemies, consisting of turtles and birds on the first level. My friend couldn't stop laughing as I threw the controller down in disgust. –Stephen Smith

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Lethal Enforcers

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: Konami.
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

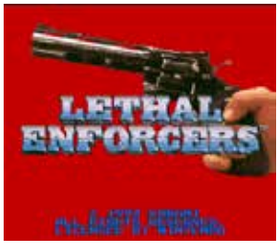
Based on Konami's 1992 arcade game (but with the blood and violence toned down—the enemies simply flicker and disappear when shot), *Lethal Enforcers* for the SNES was originally packaged with The Justifier, a pale blue, revolver-shaped light gun that works very well with the game—it's certainly superior to using a standard control pad. For two-player action, you could order a pink "Lethal Enforcers Gun 2" listed in the back of the instruction manual. Players, as Dirty Harry wannabes, take aim and fire at bad guys (who wear suits, shades, ski masks, and/or coats) and at their projectiles, which include knives, hand grenades, and bazooka shells. Each time an enemy pops up, you'd better move quickly, but care should be taken not to shoot innocent bystanders (à la *Hogan's Alley*).

Shooting various icons upgrades the player's standard issue gun to magnum, automatic, assault rifle, shotgun, machine gun, or grenade gun. Stages, which are frequently static but also scroll slowly to the right, include: The Bank Robbery, Downtown Assault (Chinatown Assault in other versions), Hijacking, The Gunrunners (The Drug Dealer in other versions), and Chemical Plant Sabotage. When you shoot glass, it shatters, unlike in the Genesis version, which lacks this environmental effect. *Lethal Enforcers* is a blast to play, but its grainy digitized graphics and garbled voice effects may turn off modernists. The Genesis and Sega CD versions are rated MA-17. *Lethal Enforcers II: Gun Fighters* appeared on the Genesis and Sega CD, but not the SNES. Followed by *Lethal Enforcers I and II*, a PlayStation title collecting both games in the series.

Notable Quotable:

"The game's about as complex as Dan Quayle, extraordinarily simple blasting fare without even the usual array of massive upgrades and icons . . . The digitized stuff looks great (especially on screenshots, animation's a bit suspect) . . . the gun's an admirably fun gimmick, and while the novelty lasts, the actual game is un-taxing and bearable, if a bit easy. And when the novelty's faded, the shooting gallery's always available to chase personal bests, which is (surprisingly) not as boring as it sounds." –*SNES Force* (March 1994)

Insider Insight:
As an eleven-year-old who had seen Clint Eastwood's *Dirty Harry* and *Magnum Force* over a dozen times, I loved *Lethal Enforcers* as it was an outlet for me to be Harry Callahan in video game form. One day my teacher told us we could draw anything we wanted, and I drew the Justifier light gun with a blood red background, similar to the opening scene of the Eastwood films I loved. It was awesome—I combined two of my favorite things. I expected the teacher to be wowed, similar to how Ralphie expects his essay to be received by his teacher in *A Christmas Story*, but she called my parents in for a conference. My parents laughed it off, but the politically correct teachers were petrified. I went home that day and played more *Lethal Enforcers* with my dad. –Patrick Hickey Jr.



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Lethal Weapon

PUBLISHER: Ocean.
DEVELOPER: Ocean.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/ Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

Inspired by the popular buddy cop film series, which began in 1987, *Lethal Weapon* lets you play as Vietnam veteran Riggs (played by Mel Gibson in the film), who shoots faster, or career cop and family man Murtaugh (Danny Glover), who can jump higher. In addition to shooting and jumping, each character can walk, run, swim, and duck, along with climb ladders, ropes, stairs, and pipes. You'll also turn switches on and off, ride moving platforms, be blown about by large fans, and deal with disappearing floors.

The game has five timed missions (you must complete the first four to unlock the fifth): infiltrate a heavily guarded downtown L.A. dock, battle drug smugglers, board a ship, and retrieve money; take on suicidal terrorists who have planted bombs on the subway; locate a bomb in a mid-town shopping mall in order to defuse it; infiltrate an office complex to rescue hostage Leo Getz; and stop an ex-police sergeant (based on Jack Travis from *Lethal Weapon 3*) who has stolen bullets and guns from the police storage department. Pickups along the way include bullets for your gun, clocks for extra time to complete the mission, and police badges that act as health. To save ammo, you can fell most enemies with one shot and a kick (as opposed to two shots). Unfortunately, there is no two-player mode. Much different than the NES and Game Boy adaptations of the film, in which Riggs and Murtaugh can punch.

Notable Quotable:
"This is a pretty average action game. The characters are short and cartoony . . . the graphics are dark and ugly." –*The Good, the Bad, and the Bogus: Nathan Lockard's Complete Guide to Video Games* (1995, Adventure Press)

Notable Quotable:
"In terms of gameplay, not only are the characters you control limited in their actions, they handle poorly and generically. Running, jumping, and shooting, trying to complete the missions is monotonous and simple-minded. There's nothing wrong with mindless action games and shoot-'em-ups, but *Lethal Weapon* has none of the excitement, urgency, or diversity these kinds of games require." –All Game Guide (formerly at www.allgame.com)

Insider Insight:
During the early-to-mid '90s, I worked as an assistant manager of a local video store. One of my responsibilities was ordering the video games we would have available for rental. I was given a limited budget in that department, so I had to make my selections wisely or else feel the wrath of the store's owner. Ocean's *Lethal Weapon* seemed like a sure thing as it's based on a popular film franchise, and we dealt in movies. But nope. All the nope. That copy rented maybe four times. I took it home one night to try it out and realized that I had made a huge mistake. When the music is the highlight of your licensed game, you know you're in trouble. While it's not the worst game out there, it certainly isn't good. My budget was slashed after that debacle. –Christopher Pico

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Liberty or Death

PUBLISHER: Koei.
DEVELOPER: Koei.
GAME TYPE: Turn-Based Strategy, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Taking place in the thirteen original colonies of North America, along with the British colonies of Canada and Florida (for a total of fifty-three districts), *Liberty or Death* lets players assume the role of George Washington (Commander in Chief of the Continental Army) during the American Revolution, when colonists were fed up with high taxes, no representation, and having to pay loyalty to King George III, who was an ocean away. Your path to victory requires effective management of men and resources, including infantry, cavalry, generals, guerilla and artillery units, cannons, boats, gold, rations, and powder. You will raise and train armies, build forts, forge new weapons, try to gain control of the seas, work to influence the loyalty of populations, and engage in top-down, turn-based battles, with outcomes decided through point-and-click commands, statistics (leadership, training, tactical expertise, discipline, etc.), the positioning of your armed forces, and the like. For a tougher challenge, you can play the game as Thomas Gage, leader of the Royal Army. You can challenge the computer or a friend, or simply sit back and watch the computer play itself. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"It is pretty cool to see a Revolutionary War sim, and the subject matter is far more graspable to most gamers than *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* or *Nobunaga's Ambition*. It's also a lot easier to pick up and figure out than either of those two series. It even handles fairly well for a PC game that was ported to a console. If you like history or strategy, this one's worth checking out; just be warned that there is a lot of reading involved, and much like the real American Revolution, it takes some serious time and effort." –Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Notable Quotable:

"As strategy games go, this is an excellent challenge. In addition to battle tactics, one must have keen management skills when dealing with the morale of your officers and troops, as well as the overall support of each district's citizens . . . There are many choices and lots of opportunities for battle . . . My sharpest criticism concerns speed of the gameplay, or lack thereof . . . The realism, accuracy of real events, and flexibility are the high points, while the graphics, sounds, and pace leave something to be desired." –Kevin Oleniacz (*Digital Press* fanzine #23, January/February 1995)

Insider Insight:

My memory of *Liberty or Death* isn't so much about the game itself as much as it is a reflection of the good old days of renting games at Blockbuster. That's what I did with this one. And like ninety percent of the other games on the shelf, it lacked a manual—you weren't that guy, were you? The one who always "forgot" to return the manual along with the game, forcing the rest of us to rely on those stupid little yellow instruction sheets pasted into the rental boxes? Because if you were, you totally ruined any chance I had at enjoying *Liberty or Death*. It's the one game I've ever played on the SNES that I gave up on after fifteen minutes or so, just because I had no idea what the hell was happening. The game is impenetrable without a manual.

One other thing I'll always remember, also related to Blockbuster: The copy available at my store (from which I both rented my games as a customer and accepted money as an employee) had an unfortunate typo on its box—"Liberty of Death." Made it sound like a celebration of suicide. Maybe that's why no one ever rented it but me—and the punk who stole the manual. –Chris Baker

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

The Lion King

PUBLISHER: Virgin Interactive Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Westwood Studios/Disney Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

The Lion King brings Disney's epic 1994 feature film to playable life as gamers guide Simba through the following levels: The Pridelands, Can't Wait to Be King, The Elephant Graveyard, The Stampede (in which Simba runs toward the screen while being chased), Simba's Exile, Hakuna Matata, and Simba's Destiny. Plus, there are two bonus rounds: Bug Toss and Bug Hunt. As a young lion, Simba can roll to access certain areas and damage things in his path. Adult Simba can slash, maul, and flip his enemies. Both can crouch, climb, duck, look up and down, roar, and pounce on enemies.

The action is varied and fun (if frustrating at times), with players, as Simba, jumping on rhinos to propel up into trees, hopping along bird nests to get to monkeys, riding an ostrich (during a particularly difficult stretch of the game), swinging and climbing through bones, getting jump boosts from elephants, running from wildebeests, throwing coconuts at a gorilla, dodging rocks thrown by hyenas, riding down waterfalls, avoiding dripping lava, and much more. There's plenty of platforming action, some of which contains puzzle elements (such as roaring at monkeys to make it past certain areas). Also released for the Game Boy, Game Gear, and Genesis.

Fun Fact:
The Lion King wasn't available in the U.S. for the NES, but it was the last official European release for the 8-bit console, hitting stores May 25, 1995.

Notable Quotable:
"Thanks to the use of artwork created by Disney animators, this Simba moves so fluidly and so realistically you'd swear you were playing an interactive cartoon. (Of course, the intensity of that sensation depends on which version you play: Though the two games are structurally identical, the Super NES *Lion King* is far superior to its Genesis counterpart—better graphics, music, and sound effects.) But what really makes this veldt vivid is something you might not expect from a Disney project: a palpable sense of menace that outstrips even the movie's scary regicide scene. A showcase sequence in which you have to guide Simba out of the path of a wildebeest stampede is the hairiest interactive experience this side of crossing a freeway on foot. And thanks to the weird exigencies of the video game world, which dictate that enemies be plentiful and unrelenting, even the relatively carefree interlude that unfolds to the strains of 'Hakuna Matata' is populated by poison-spitting frogs. It's in the second half of the game, though, that *The Lion King* really shows its claws. Controlling Simba when he's a playful bundle of fur is one thing; putting him through his paces as a full-maned adult is quite another. When the grown-up Simba gives a blood-curdling roar and mauls snarling hyenas, the interaction is so well observed that it's like watching a PBS nature documentary. The sense of power it gives you is exhilarating, and by the time Simba takes his climactic heavyweight stand against his evil uncle Scar, this *Lion King* has turned into a wild-kingdom variant of *Street Fighter II*." –Bob Strauss (*Entertainment Weekly*, November 1994)

Insider Insight:
Adapting movies into video games seemed like a million-dollar idea, one that quickly became the laughing stock of the game industry and making all players raise an eyebrow with each release. *The Lion King* was ported to almost every major system at the time; I had played it on the Game Boy and Super Nintendo, while friends of mine had it on the PC or the Sega Genesis. Initially, *The Lion King* is an incredibly faithful adaptation of the timeless Disney film, with impressive voice bites and great renditions of the music. The colors of each stage are pleasant, and the characters are well-animated, setting up a lot of promise.

Then the infamous second level starts, dashing all hopes of the player finishing the game or even seeing the next level. Bouncing from monkey to monkey is incredibly frustrating, revealing just how sloppy the controls are. This level became bragging rights for anyone who could beat it, making those players legends on the playground. To this day, the second level of *The Lion King* is hailed as one of the most unnecessarily difficult gaming segments in Super Nintendo history. –Alex McCumbers

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Lock On

PUBLISHER: Vic Tokai.
DEVELOPER: Copya System.
GAME TYPE: Flight Combat Simulator, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Viewed from behind your jet fighter, *Lock On* is a fast, rapid-fire, arcade-like game in which you fly through the air, doing barrel rolls and shooting bullets, heat-seeking missiles, radar-guided missiles, and the like at enemies on the ground and in the air. You can pilot four different planes, each with different attributes: F-14 Tomcat, which carries a heavy missile load and has long-range strike capabilities; A10 Warthog, which has a powerful Gatling Cannon; British Tornado, a high-speed, low-altitude attack plane with a large missile payload; or Japanese FSX, a highly maneuverable aircraft with deadly accurate missiles.

In addition to shooting enemies and dodging their firepower, you can fire flares to turn away incoming missiles, and there are missions to complete, such as destroying enemy airfields and taking down a certain number of enemies (which brings out a boss). According to the game's storyline, your overall objective is to stop a madman from blowing up the United Nations. Snazzy fighters and nice rotation and scaling make for a cool-looking experience (despite dull backgrounds), but the action does get repetitious, even though it's a short game. Known as *Super Air Diver* in Japan and Europe. A sequel, *Super Air Diver 2*, was released exclusively in Japan for the Super Famicom.

Notable Quotable:

"*Lock On* is a game that'll really get your adrenaline pumping. After all, barreling through waves upon waves of hostile fighters, dodging missiles left to right, and pulling off sick aerial stunts are all in a day's work. Of course, that's not to say it doesn't get old seeing the same palette-swapped polygons zooming around the screen launching rockets at you. *Lock On* may be pretty fun from the get-go, but the levels slowly turn repetitious and drab as the game carries on . . . *Lock On*'s main problem is its lack of variety. Players will simply find themselves bored out of their mind, wondering why they're playing such a pointless game that progresses by recycling the same mission design over and over again. If I ever pop in *Lock On* again, it'd be to play the first level just to indulge in the awesome graphics, which are arguably the only shining points this game has to boast. Don't expect me to sit through the pain of actually finishing a run-through! I'm just a sucker for vibrant explosions and those beautifully rendered aircraft models. This game would benefit greatly from some novel ideas here or there to break the numbing repetition. Either that, or throw in some ninjas!" –Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Looney Tunes B-Ball

PUBLISHER: Sunsoft/Warner Bros.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Basketball, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Predating the movie *Space Jam* by more than a year, *Looney Tunes B-Ball* takes the over-the-top, two-on-two, turbo-charged hoops stylings of *NBA Jam* and combines it with the cartoon antics of Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Marvin the Martian, Sylvester, Yosemite Sam, Tasmanian Devil, Wile E. Coyote, and Elmer Fudd. Each character has different strengths and weaknesses, such as speed, stamina, and three-pointer shooting ability, and each has a cartoonish defense move. For example: Taz breaks into a tornado spin, knocking down anyone he touches; and Yosemite Sam fires his gun at a defender's feet, forcing him to dance and drop the ball.

Tournament mode lets one or two players pick a character and challenge all the other characters. You can set the length of the quarters and choose from ten difficulty levels. Sometimes a gem will appear on the court that you can grab for buying offensive and defensive ACME plays. These enable you to make long shots and do such wacky things as turn the ball into a cream pie or time bomb, transport your teammate to a spot near the basket, transform the scoreboard into a slot machine, darken the screen, or push opposing players. When a player makes three baskets in a row, his attributes get a super boost. The game, which is as fun as it sounds, is fast paced and has excellent, cartoonlike graphics. Known as *Looney Tunes Basketball* in some regions.

Notable Quotable:

"*Looney Tunes B-Ball* had one of the smoothest development cycles in my experience thanks to the team at Sculptured Software, led by Ned Martin . . . The biggest thing scrapped was the original name, 'Looney Tunes Hoop It Up.' We unveiled the game at CES and had a 'Hoop it up' basketball-throwing game at our booth, giving away T-shirts with the logo . . . Then came the lawyers from the 'Hoop It Up' national basketball tour." –Former Sunsoft producer/director René Boutin (via dromble.wordpress.com)

Notable Quotable:

"While the game is a clone of *NBA Jam*, it's a good clone of it, right down to the turbo boost, the fun dunking mechanics, and 'he's on fire.' However, this game does bring original components to the table as well . . . controls were pretty easy to pick up and play . . . using special abilities was a snap . . . all the courts look exactly the same . . . the Tournament mode is terrible. The set difficulty is five, and you can't change it . . . while I can defeat a few teams with that difficulty, the A.I. is wicked cheap in this mode and brutal. It doesn't matter if you pick the fastest characters for this mode either, because somehow the computer will be even faster than you . . . Playing this game in Tournament mode by yourself is not worth the frustration . . . but this is the only time in the game where it feels like any part of it is broken." –kNIGHTWING01 (YouTube)

Insider Insight:

When I was in high school in 1999, file-sharing on the internet became the next big thing. Napster had just come out, and everyone was downloading music for free. This was also around the time emulation started taking off. In my school, however, I felt like I was the only one who knew anything about emulators and the fact you could download any NES and SNES game for free if you searched the internet properly and knew what you were doing.

This brought me to *Looney Tunes B-Ball*. I had seen it a few years earlier in the rental store, but because I wasn't into basketball or Looney Tunes at the time, I had never rented it. However, by this point I had become an *NBA Jam* fan and had grown fond of the Looney Tunes characters from trips to Six Flags Great Adventure, so I made sure it was the first game I tried on an emulator.

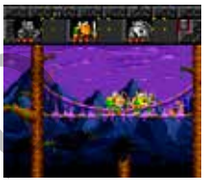
Much to my enjoyment, the game did not disappoint. It played a lot like *NBA Jam*, plus I could be Marvin the Martian. He was one of my favorite characters, and I always enjoyed his special dunk where he would hover over the net and throw it down. The game was incredible. Not only was it fun to play, it introduced me to the whole emulator scene. I'll never forget telling my friends about what I had discovered, but they just laughed. They didn't understand anything about emulators and roms—the internet simply wasn't that big yet.

One day that year I didn't go to school because I had a doctor's appointment. When I returned to school the following day, my teacher told me she was worried because my friend Jim had told her I wasn't in school because "I was trapped in my emulator and couldn't get out." Every time I play *Looney Tunes B-Ball*, I think of that ridiculous joke. And I think about how the game sent me down the path of emulating games for the SNES. –Raymond Fix

Sniffer Publishing LLC

The Lost Vikings

PUBLISHER: Interplay Productions.
DEVELOPER: Silicon & Synapse.
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle, 1–3 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.



After a fine day of pillaging and plundering, Erik the Swift (who can run, jump, and bash through walls with his helmet), Baleog the Fierce (who battles with arrows and a sword), and Olaf the Stout (who has a shield that can block attacks, work as a step to stand on, or let him float long distances) are kidnapped by the evil space zoo operator Tomator. Working together, the trio of Vikings must escape, which takes them through more than thirty-five nicely illustrated, puzzle-filled levels spread across five worlds: Tomator's Spaceship, Prehistoria, Ancient Egypt, The Great Factory, and Wacky World. Each Viking has a specific skillset and character-specific weaponry (for battling mummies, dinosaurs, and other enemies), meaning they must work together to complete each level—one Viking alone cannot finish a stage.

Players can alternate between the colorful, comical, cartoonish Vikings (you can only control one character at a time) or have a friend or two join in to help. Also helpful are the various items the players can find, including flaming arrows, bombs, keys (for unlocking doors of the same color), buttons and switches (which activate things like doors), gravity boots, and steaks (which replenish health). Text clues are given as well. *The Lost Vikings* has humor, style, and substance, but it's not for the impatient gamer looking to mindlessly barrel his or her way through each level. *Lemmings* fans should enjoy it, though you do have more direct control over characters in this game. Also released for the Genesis and Game Boy Advance.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are sumptuous, particularly the waterfalls and snowcapped mountains. Lovely stuff. What's more, the whole thing is topped off with a rocking funky soundtrack with some great samples. *The Lost Vikings* is hardcore cerebral action with a very natty line in helmets. It's dead smart." –*Total!* (May 1993)

Insider Insight:

Generally speaking, puzzle games were reserved for my Game Boy because of long bus rides to school, and my home console was reserved for action games for me to blow off steam after a long day. One Friday night, a friend and I rented *The Lost Vikings* from our local video store, not knowing much about the game other than the cover art and small screenshots looking interesting. After plugging it in and discovering it was a puzzle game, we were disappointed at first, but in an effort to salvage our rental fee we made the best of it. Before we knew it, we were sucked into the game, playing cooperatively, helping each other get through the complex levels, playing well past midnight. We never did solve all of the levels, but we rented the game so many times that we could have paid for our own copy at least three times. A game that encourages cooperative play and brings friends together is a win! –Delf Meek

Insider Insight:

When *The Lost Vikings* came out for the SNES in 1992, I was just a runt kid with my nose smashed deep in the pages of *Nintendo Power*. One issue covered a new title about these bombastic Vikings who get captured by aliens and have to work together to escape. They looked so cool, and the unique style of each Viking really appealed to me. I spent hours trying to draw the characters but never could get them just right. Little did I know at the time that these were Blizzard (as Silicon & Synapse) masterpieces I was trying to copy as a ten-year-old.

I first played the game as a rental from Blockbuster Video and instantly fell in love with the puzzle/action combination gameplay. Each of the three Vikings had a unique ability that had to be exploited if the player was going to be successful in completing each stage. I must have rented the game five more times before I ever made it to the later stages. I was addicted to the mashup gameplay, the colorful art style, and funny quips.

This gameplay style inspired my later work. In 2008, I worked as a game designer on a version of *Ben 10 Alien Force*, which was being published by Konami Digital LTD. In the TV show, Ben and his buddies Kevin and Gwen usually team up to face whatever villain threatens the world. I felt *The Lost Vikings*-style gameplay of switching between characters would be a good inspiration when designing for *Ben 10*. After all, both properties share sci-fi elements as well as themes of teamwork. Eventually, the character-changing mechanics gave way to some other gameplay choices in the game I was designing, but I feel the *Lost Vikings* approach initially got our concept off the ground. –Matt Raithel

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

The Lost Vikings 2

PUBLISHER: Interplay Productions.
DEVELOPER: Blizzard Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1997.

Armed with high-tech weaponry they stole from their evil alien captor Tomator, Erik the Swift, Baleog the Fierce, and Olaf the Stout must find the time machine that will take them home to their Nordic village. The player guides these characters in tandem (switch control of characters as needed), using their different skills through thirty-one strategic levels spread over five worlds. Erik jumps, swims, and head-butts (for ramming enemies and breaking loose walls); Baleog has an energy saber and a bionic arm (for punching, knocking out target buttons, and grabbing such items as jewels, keys, bombs, torches, and food); Olaf has a shield, he can shrink to fit into narrow places, and he can fart (which destroys floors and gives him a lift while gliding). Plus, there are two new characters: Fang the Werewolf, who can jump, cling to walls, and claw opponents; and Scorch the Dragon, who can jump, fly, glide, and breathe balls of fire.

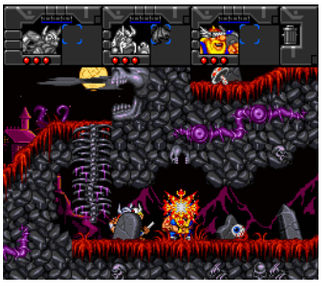
Within the levels, there are buttons to press, switches to flip, and target boxes to hit—each action has an effect on the screen, such as opening passageways, lowering bridges, and calling elevators. There's platforming and climbing as well. Enemies include bats, skeletons, vampires, wizards, piranhas, parrots, vines, jellyfish, headhunters, and V-100 bots (mechanized hunters), among others. Despite the new skills and characters, gameplay is similar to the original *The Lost Vikings*, which is a good thing. The version for the PlayStation, Sega Saturn, and PC, which is called *Norse by Norse West: The Return of The Lost Vikings*, features pre-rendered 3D graphics, CD music, and voice acting by Rob Paulsen (Erik), Jeff Bennett (Baleog, Fang), Jim Cummings (Olaf, Tomator), and Frank Welker (Scorch).

Notable Quotable:

"Part of every Blizzard fan's shelf should be made up of the Lost Vikings series, a smart, immersive strategy gameplay experience that will have you hooked for hours . . . *Lost Vikings 2* is an exceptional combination of platform and strategy elements, and there's no doubt that *World of Warcraft* and *Diablo* aren't the only addictive games that Blizzard has made." –CGRundertow (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"In the SNES version of the game, more abilities can be unlocked at the beginning by killing Erik on the first level by double jumping



off of Olaf's shield and falling to his death. This gives the following abilities only found in the SNES version: Erik can now shoot sparks from his hands; Baleog can slide across the ground while slashing his sword, making him temporarily invincible; Olaf can attack enemies by teleporting into them; Fang can 'electrify' himself while he's standing still, allowing him to become temporarily invincible; and Scorch can fly indefinitely." –Giant Bomb (www.giantbomb.com)

Offer Publishing LTD

Lufia & The Fortress of Doom

PUBLISHER: Taito.
DEVELOPER: Neverland.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

In a battle against the Sinistrals, the four masters of Doom Island, you have a team of four powerful heroes at your disposal: Maxim the knight, Guy the warrior, Selan the mage, and Artea the elf, who's an archery expert. You will travel through a short dungeon to the top floor where the Sinistrals reside, battling monsters along the way. After you reach the top and defeat four bosses, the fortress will come apart and the heroes will get separated. This set-up scenario gets players accustomed to the game's battle system, items, spells, and storyline. Eventually, you will control a team consisting of: Maxim's descendant, a warrior who knows some magic; your friend Lufia, a master magician; Aguro, a powerful soldier; and Jerin, a half-elf who wields a bow and knows many healing spells. Gameplay is typical of RPGs of the era, with players exploring towns and dungeons, solving puzzles, and engaging in random turn-based battles by selecting attack, magic, defend, item or run. Known as *Estpolis Denki* in Japan, this was the first game in the "Lufia" series.

Notable Quotable:

"This is a slow-paced RPG with an overhead perspective, an interesting story, and plenty of weapons. The enemies are plentiful and fearsome, but the music is a bit on the goofy side which doesn't really fit the theme." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"From its detailed graphics to its immense size, *Lufia*'s hot. If you think the age-old confrontation between good and evil has been done to death, give it a try. It's as good an RPG as you could hope for." –*Game Players* (January 1994)

Insider Insight:

When I was as a kid, my cousin and I were opposites in many respects. He was heavily into video games, while I grew up doing sports and Boy Scouts. However, I also liked video games and had an SNES. Every summer he would come up from Virginia and lend me a couple of games. One summer he brought *Lufia & The Fortress of Doom*, and I was intrigued. The bright colors are what I noticed first, and I begged to play it. He refused to let me try the game, which made me want to play it even more. I was obsessing over it. He finally allowed me to play the five-minute segment at the beginning, and that was it. He felt that RPGs were just not my type of game.

My birthday was coming up that September, and I remember my father asking me what I wanted. *Lufia & The Fortress of Doom* was the only thing on my mind, and he got it for me. This was my very first role-playing game experience, and I absolutely loved it. To this day, I remember every little piece of the story and how it made me feel, and I know anyone reading this who remembers the game will never forget the difficulty spike when you found the water ghost in the red tower. Grinding for weeks for the fight will always stay with me, but nothing felt better than defeating the water ghost. –Raymond Fix

Sonnet Publishing, LTD

Lufia II: *Rise of the Sinistrals*

PUBLISHER: Natsume.
DEVELOPER: Neverland.
GAME TYPE: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1996.

This sequel to *Lufia & the Fortress of Doom* brings back the greedy Sinistrals and their unquenchable thirst for power. Arek, the leader of the Sinistrals, has access to the Dual Blade, a sword of unprecedented power. With the magical sword in his possession and a gang of elemental monsters on his side, Arek is confident his people will conquer the gentle folks of Lufia and take their land. Luckily, Maxim the monster hunter and seven other warriors (each with his or her own type of weapon and skill) sympathetic to the Lufian cause are ready and willing to thwart the Sinistrals and once again bring peace to Lufia. Your job is to guide Maxim and his fellow adventurers through this massive quest.

During your journey you will battle monsters, cast spells, converse with townsfolk, bomb castle walls, find treasure, solve puzzles, search for and purchase special items, play casino games, and commandeer vehicles such as a boat, a submarine, and a blimp. For assistance during your quest, you can find capsule monsters hidden in treasure chests. These creatures fight alongside your pals, helping you ward off enemies, but you cannot control them. Known as *Estpolis Denki II* in Japan, *Lufia II* was followed by *Lufia: The Legend Returns* (Game Boy Color), *Lufia: The Ruins of Lore* (Game Boy Advance), and *Lufia: Curse of the Sinistrals* (Nintendo DS).

Notable Quotable:

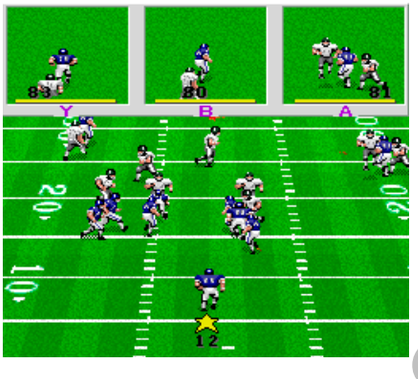
"*Lufia II* features excellent music. Even the slightly repetitive dungeon tracks are well done. Little can compare with the boss and Sinistral themes as they are some of the best boss tracks found on the SNES. Even the sound effects are very well done for the most part . . . While *Lufia II* doesn't have the greatest visuals, they are still quite good. Out of battle, environments are fairly well detailed and even character sprites seem to have been given careful attention. In battle, enemies have been given great detail, especially bosses. There are tons of palette swaps to be found, which detracts from this slightly . . . Despite borrowing from several other games, *Lufia II* mixes everything together well with a few new ideas of its own to create a good game. The story is good and dungeons are exciting due to the many puzzles and the ability to avoid monsters . . . It is a vast improvement over the original." –Derek 'Roku' Cavin (www.rpgamer.com)

Insider Insight:
Lufia II was a staple of my seventh grade days. While largely barren of stores with games for sale, my town actually had a few places offering the game for rent, including a barely memorable place next to our nearest Food City. We went through a period where we'd actually rent games on Sunday evenings (the end of the week, as far as I was concerned) as we stayed the first part of the week at our dad's house in Shagbark, a gated community deep in the mountains of Tennessee. Many are the mornings I would secretly wake up around 3:00 or 4:00 a.m. to play more *Lufia II* before getting ready to go to school. You just ain't lived until you've been in a small, barely habitable house deep in the woods and gotten up well before you should to play through one of the best JRPGs America ever got—some of my best gaming memories of that era. I'm still trying to beat "The World's Most Difficult Trick." –Jeff Lawhead

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Madden NFL '94

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: High Score Productions/Visual Concepts.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.



The third John Madden game for the SNES (after *John Madden Football* and *John Madden Football '93*), *Madden NFL '94* offers a number of upgrades over *John Madden Football '93*, including color commentary by Madden, NFL licensing, five-player action (as opposed to four in the Genesis version), the ability to customize audibles at any time, bluffing (which lets gamers hide plays), and faster gameplay. In addition, this was the first Madden game to pause the action and rotate the screen during kickoffs, punts, and turnovers, rather than instantly reversing the point of view to the opposite side of the field, which could be jarring and disorienting. The game also offered a 360° camera view for instant replays. Eighty teams are available: twenty-eight standard NFL squads; thirty-eight Super Bowl teams since 1966; twelve all-star franchise teams since 1950; and two All-Madden teams. The game is also noteworthy for introducing the now-iconic "EA Sports—It's in the Game" audio tag.

Notable Quotable:

"*Madden NFL '94* was a game of great significance for EA Sports, not least because it was the studio's first American football title to be officially endorsed by the NFL. Contemporary gamers will no doubt find it hard to imagine a Madden NFL title without official teams, players, and logos, but until the 1994 installment came along, fans had to make do with fictitious teams based on their real-life counterparts. However, some ended up with a version of the game that had the team rosters for the New York Giants and New York Jets reversed, the result of a programming error that affected initial batches of the title. *Madden NFL '94* marked a departure from the arcade-like simplicity of past offerings, giving fans the opportunity to take part in a full regular season with the aid of a password system . . . the redrawn character models, which were chunkier and more robust, were far more convincing . . . Sound effects also took great strides, as tackles connected with a satisfying crunch, while Madden himself chimed in with various quips like 'POW!' The title was a bestseller in North America, its propulsion to the top of the software charts aided by rave reviews in the press." –Mark Langshaw (www.digitalspy.com)

Insider Insight:

I was totally broke when the Super Nintendo first hit the scene; the term "poor college student" was the perfect description of me in the early '90s. One Christmas, between semesters, I went with my Mom and Dad from my hometown in New Jersey to frigid Rochester, New York, to visit my sister. Leaving the relative freedom of my dorm life for a week to sit around a house in the frozen tundra of northern New York State was not exactly how I wanted to spend the holiday break. Upon arrival, however, I was delighted beyond words to discover that she had an SNES! Having never had the chance to play one, it was all I could do not to ignore my entire family for the week.

In fact, I pretty much did.

I headed to the local movie/game rental shop and picked up *NHL 94* and *Madden NFL '94* and proceeded to immerse myself in both games. I tried—and failed—to win the Stanley Cup playoffs a half-dozen times with my New Jersey Devils, while also suffering the ignominy of a 4–6 start to the NFL season with the Philadelphia Eagles.

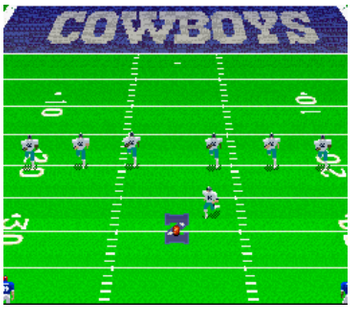
While I struggled at first making the leap from my familiar NES sports games to these much bigger, more complex SNES ones, I couldn't help but be enthralled with how beautiful they looked and played. Even cooler was the authenticity of it all: real teams, real players, cool plays and strategies, the Stanley Cup, and the Super Bowl. I instantly felt like the coolest kid in town with these next-generation experiences. When the week was over and I headed back home—back to my 'boring' NES—I committed myself to figuring out a way to save up the money to get my own Super Nintendo.

It took several months (and a few less parties than the previous semester), but I finally scraped up the cash for an SNES, and I never looked back. –Richard Grisham

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Madden NFL 95

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts/ High Score Productions.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



Madden NFL 95 improves upon the previous game in the series with a variety of new features, including a windowless passing option (a welcome feature for gamers wanting a better look at the field), celebration dances, the ability to substitute players in any position, ten new Madden-designed defensive schemes, new offensive moves (straight arm, high steppin', and QB slides), 3D rendered players, more than one hundred player injuries, and team and position stats all season long. Past Super Bowl and all-star teams have been removed. Modes of play include Exhibition, Season, Playoffs, and Sudden Death, where the first team to score wins the game. All twenty-eight teams and stadiums from the 1994 NFL season are included, as well as the All-Madden team. Each team has a forty-eight-player roster. Fox's NFL theme plays during the option screens. Also released for the Game Gear and Genesis. Released as *Madden '95* on the Game Boy.

Notable Quotable:

"No football season would be complete without the release of the latest Madden games for the SNES and Genesis. While each retains the same overall look from last year, both carts feature new graphics and animation. The players have been digitized and are much more realistic-looking compared to the previous games. Since the SNES can show more colors and objects on the screen than the Genesis, it has a bit more flash, like detailed stadium graphics, team names in the end zones, and a 'hang time' clock." *–Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (January 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"The first thing I noticed about *Madden NFL 95* was its Fox NFL theme music. I love that song—it reminds me of Thanksgiving! Otherwise, *Madden NFL 95* is somewhat disappointing . . . the players have been redrawn with skinny bodies and fat heads . . . the players are poorly defined and tend to blend into each other . . . Where's the halftime show? There's a lot wrong with *Madden NFL 95*, but EA did one thing right, and that's dropping the passing windows. That's right, you can now survey the open field, making the passing a lot easier and much more satisfying. Unfortunately, whether your receiver catches the ball or not seems to have more to do with chance than skill . . . The running game is tougher than last year . . . Two-point conversions are a new option, adding a nice bit of strategy. One huge flaw is how the game clock is not displayed on the screen during the snap—only the play clock is . . . a wildly uneven football experience." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:
The Super Nintendo certainly had its share of great sports games, but to me the John Madden football series was extra special. Part of this was the real-life Madden's outsized personality—who can forget his All Madden Teams, endless praise for the Dallas Cowboys' 1990s-era offensive line, and those "Boom! Tough Actin' Tinactin" commercials. But the games were fantastic, too, and *Madden NFL 95* was as classic as any of them. For starters, it was the first in the series to show the entire downfield during play (as opposed to passing windows around the receivers), which gave it a much more realistic, TV-like feel.

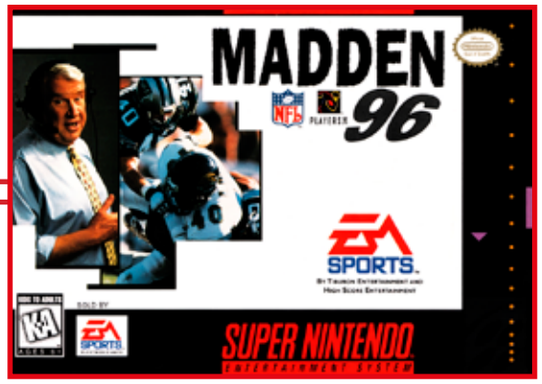
As teenagers in Dallas in the 1990s, my brothers and I constantly played *Madden NFL 95* with and against each other and friends. Of course, we always wanted to play as the Cowboys, and the trash talk would fly whenever we squared off against anyone playing as the hated Eagles, Redskins, or 49ers. Coming off recent back-to-back Super Bowl wins, the Cowboys were one of the game's strongest teams, and my security blanket play was a single-back formation right side HB toss to Emmitt Smith that would almost always guarantee a first down. Even as a Cowboys fan, though, it was always cool to enter the secret codes to play as the new NFL expansion teams Carolina Panthers and Jacksonville Jaguars—probably my favorite SNES sports secret, apart from unlocking the hidden characters in *NBA Jam*.

Who knows when the Cowboys will finally win another actual Super Bowl, but in *Madden NFL 95*, it's always going to be within reach. "Boom!" –Shane Stein

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Madden NFL 96

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: Tiburon Entertainment/ High Score Productions.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.



Madden NFL 96 introduced the much lauded General Manager mode to the series. Other new features include custom TD celebrations, faster gameplay (not necessarily a positive), a 5-Receiver Passing Mode, laterals, fair catches, tighter pass coverage, NFL and Scouting Combine records, and more than 240 redesigned plays from Madden's own playbook. Pat Summerall and Lesley Visser join John Madden in the broadcast booth. One huge upgrade is NFLPA licensing, meaning real player names are used, supplemented by player portraits. As is typical with the franchise, the game oozes with attention to detail as players can call audibles, blitz, perform tryouts, do fake snap signals, put on bursts of speed, spin, hurdle, throw laterals, aim kicks, do onside kicks, and much more.

Notable Quotable:

"*Madden NFL 96* solidifies its position as the top-ranked SNES football cart with a load of new features and upgrades. And it gets the nudge over its Genesis counterpart." –*GamePro* (December 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"*Madden NFL 96* contains the same goofy running animations as *Madden NFL 95*, but the players look sharper this year because they're wearing shoes. The gameplay is much faster than *Madden NFL 95*, with plays that often unfold before you can react. The clock really flies, which is problematic since you cannot view the game clock after leaving the play-calling screen. Quarterbacks now have more pronounced throwing motions, but this makes getting off a pass very difficult. The kicking game is also weird. As the ball approaches the uprights, it becomes absolutely huge. EA didn't put a lot of effort into this *Madden 96*, and its unrealistic speed makes it the least playable Madden in years." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:
My brothers and I owned every SNES John Madden football game from 1993 to 1997. But having left town for college in 1996 (the SNES stayed home), I only rarely played that year's Madden title, and scarcely partook of its new spotlighted feature—the ability to create players and customize your own teams. In our house, that opportunity fell to my youngest brother Reid who, along with his buddies Scott and Anthony, inserted themselves and other friends as player characters all throughout our *Madden NFL 96* cartridge. But I barely noticed and hardly gave the game a thought once the 1997 sequel arrived.

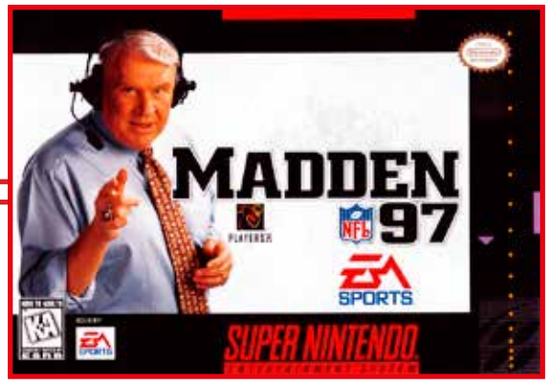
Fast forward, though, to 2012, when I located our SNES games at my parents' house and played them for the first time in ages. Sure enough, in *Madden NFL 96* Reid and his friends had filled the stat leaderboards. But then an unexpected name caught my eye—holding nearly every league rushing record was a running back called Dodger Stein. That's right, our childhood family dog, Dodger, supplanted Barry Sanders and Emmitt Smith atop the yardage and touchdown charts. Half border collie, half sheltie, Dodger in real life could outrun just about everyone, and would chase (and keep up with) the cars that frequently drove past our front yard. So it wasn't too surprising that Reid named his team's running back after our pooch.

Dodger's been gone now for many years, and we fondly recall him in our photos and memories. But in his own unique way, he lives on in *Madden NFL 96*, still outracing defenders and capturing the end zone. This is one cartridge where I'll never reset the stats. –Shane Stein

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd

Madden NFL 97

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: Tiburon Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1996.



Updated for the 1996 season, *Madden NFL 97* carries the franchise forward with a number of new features, including player fatigue, motion-captured player graphics, more than 500 redesigned Madden plays, the ability to control any player at any time, the ability to create players at any position, and a salary cap when you are customizing team rosters. The game also features the new Baltimore Ravens expansion team, which absorbed the Cleveland Browns roster for the 1996 season. Classic teams make a return appearance (ranging from the 1952 Detroit Lions to the 1990 Buffalo Bills), but most are different from the previous game in the series. Unlike the Genesis version, the SNES game includes a hang time meter for punts, an EA Sports Ticker (displaying other scores during Season and Playoffs mode), and a special End Game Now mode. Also released for the Saturn and PlayStation.

Notable Quotable:

"You can get used to the 'jumpiness' of the animation and some of the quirks in gameplay. It may not be the perfect football cartridge, but the amount of features and polished-looking package make it a solid choice for the casual fan or those who loved previous games in the series. The hardcore fan will undoubtedly be put off with the lack of a decent challenge and unrealistic stats, but there are certainly worse football games on the system." –All Game Guide (formerly at www.allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Madden NFL 97* tweaks several aspects of the game, but many changes are not warranted, and most are not welcome. The graphics are a mixed bag. The players look more realistic, but the decision to add 'texture' to the grass field was a bad idea. Especially in the end zones, the texture looks like a complete mess. In terms of gameplay, *Madden NFL 97* is probably the most balanced since *Madden NFL '94*, and the action has been slowed down to a reasonable pace. It's still tough to get a pass off, but even deflected passes can be caught. When [you are] throwing, the ball is often out of sync with the arm motion, and occasionally it appears to *squirt out the side*! Pat Summerall helps Madden with the commentator duties, chiming in with unenthusiastic lines like 'incomplete.' The audio sucks in general . . . this edition is very playable but unspectacular." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Scriffer Publishing LTD

Madden NFL 98

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: Tiertex.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Football, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1997.

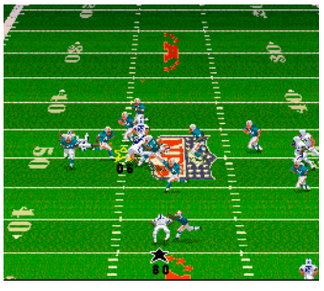
Madden NFL 98 was the last iteration of the series to appear on the SNES, Genesis, and Saturn. Gameplay is similar to *Madden NFL 97*, but with updated rosters, a new user interface, enhanced A.I. (in which the computer opponent learns the opponent's tendencies as play wears on), and seemingly random player and team hot and cold streaks. Gamers can select from any of the thirty NFL teams from the 1997 season, replay any of the previous ten Super Bowls, or play as the 1997 All-Madden team or one of twenty-eight classic NFL squads from past seasons. Gamers can also substitute players, trade and release team members, insert themselves in the game, call tons of plays, and pull off such special moves as dive-tackles, hurdles, spin moves, and stiff-arms. As with *Madden NFL 97*, players are created by performing various tryout mini-games, such as 40 Yard Dash, Obstacle Course, and Punt/Kick Distance Drill. The Genesis version of *Madden NFL 98* lacks such tryouts. The PlayStation and Saturn versions of the game have next-gen graphics and in-game commentary by Pat Summerall. Followed by numerous sequels, including *Madden NFL 99* for the PlayStation and Nintendo 64.

Notable Quotable:

"With solid gameplay, a wide range of options, and O.K. graphics, *Madden NFL 98* is probably the last gasp for 16-bit football. For collectors or football fans who don't have a Madden game, don't delay. Oh, and *Madden 98* is pretty much like last year's game." –*Nintendo Power* (November 1997)

Notable Quotable:

"The only real differences between *Madden NFL 98* and *Madden NFL 97* are updated rosters and a horrible new user interface. Navigating this user-hostile monstrosity is awkward and counterintuitive . . . The music has been needlessly cranked up, and the game has some really obvious glitches. When you set up a game like Patriots at Baltimore, Madden and Pat Summerall begin by saying, 'Welcome to Chicago.' Although the basic gameplay is unchanged, a very unwelcome new feature has been added: 'hot and cold streaks.' That's right, your favorite team might just suck for the simple reason that the game randomly determined them to be 'cold.' Madden had a good run on the SNES, but *Madden NFL 98* ends the series with a whimper." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)



Scrifer Publishing LTD

Magic Boy

PUBLISHER: JVC.
DEVELOPER: Blue Turtle.
GAME TYPE: Vertical Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1996.

As the wizard's apprentice Hewlett, a short, chubby blond-haired guy with a blue costume and a red cape, you've made a terrible mistake, turning your master into a giant blue elephant and all the other creatures in the land into monsters. To correct your screw-up, you must travel through sixty-four levels spread over four worlds (Sand Land, Wet World, Plastic Place, and Future Zone), capturing the monsters and throwing them in jail. Each world scrolls vertically, but most areas wrap around to the right and left, meaning if you walk off the screen horizontally you'll end up on the other side. Using his wand, Hewlett shoots enemies to stun them. He then captures the creatures and dumps them in certain areas.

Weapon power-ups are available, including triple shots and shots that go straight up instead of in front of Hewlett. There are also springs for bouncing up to higher areas, hidden continues, and extra lives.

Hewlett, who can duck, spends a lot of time hopping around on platforms, but it's not always immediately obvious which is the best way to proceed through a level, giving the game some puzzle elements. Adding to the challenge and diversity are disintegrating platforms, conveyor belts, obstacles that prevent Hewlett from jumping, and deadly pools of water. The game is cute, but doesn't fully make use of the processing power of the SNES. The saccharine-sweet music and sound effects get old pretty quickly, but the game is harder than it looks and sounds.

Fun Fact:
Magic Boy was first published in Europe in 1993, for the Amiga, Atari ST, and MS-DOS by Empire Interactive. According to the *Advance Edition* of the *Digital Press Collector's Guide* (2004), a stash of the SNES cartridges was found by wholesalers well after it was published, making it less rare than originally thought.

Notable Quotable:
"A cute and colorful but rather uninspiring platformer full of niggling annoyances. No more Amiga conversions—please!" –*Nintendo Magazine System* (June 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Don't let the cartoon graphics and cute music lull you into false confidence—this game is hard! Fortunately, the game is worth the effort. Hewlett may have messed up the magic potion, but JVC got the mixture right." –*GamePro* (December 1993)

Sandiffer Publishing LTD

Magic Sword

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Minakuchi Engineering.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/ Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

Though it lacks the two-player co-op mode and a few of the enemies, *Magic Sword* for the SNES is a nice port of Capcom's 1990 arcade game (which is subtitled "Heroic Fantasy" on the title screen). You control a blond barbarian as he scales fifty-one floors of a castle, hacking, slashing, and shooting fantasy creatures as he goes. You're equipped with a sword and can use an axe and magic. Setting the adventure apart from the pack is your ability to find keys to open doors containing a computer-controlled ally to walk with you, attacking each time you attack. There are eight different allies, including a female archer, a bomb-throwing thief, a star-hurling ninja, and a sword-throwing lizard man. The lizard man is powerful, but won't join you unless you've acquired a diamond ring. If not, he'll attack your character like a standard enemy.

Making contact with monsters, traps, projectiles, and the like decreases your health, but you can reenergize by grabbing food. Throughout the game, which has multiple paths and two separate endings, you can break open chests that release treasure and artifacts, the latter of which can increase your magic power and damage capabilities. When your magic bar is fully charged, you can do powerful ranged attacks, but when it's not you can only pull off close-range attacks. Your ultimate goal is to defeat Drokkmar, master of the Blackorb.

Notable Quotable:

"Every level is littered with treasure chests full of items . . . it's overkill just how many there are on any given level . . . The home port loses some of the arcade's enemies, and so you'll face the same three to four bad guys in every level . . . Some of the backgrounds and stage themes also tend to repeat themselves . . . Around every eight floors you'll face a massive boss, which does break up the monotony as they prove suitably challenging to defeat. This is definitely an arcade game down to its roots, a fact born out through its challenge and setup. For the most part this SNES incarnation is faithful to the arcade. Most of the sprites have made it over intact, and the backgrounds have only suffered a minimal loss of detail . . . There's a ton of slowdown at every turn as soon as three or more sprites fill the screen, which is a regular occurrence. Slowdown aside, the flaws in gameplay also exist in the arcade game . . . Though it has a few rough patches, I can still enjoy *Magic Sword* and recommend it to hack-and-slash fans." –Retro Game Age (www.retrogameage.com)

Insider Insight:

The vast majority of my SNES memories come from playing other people's consoles. I was an Atari and Sega kid back then, and my recollections of Capcom's classic arcade conversion are no different. Shortly after my younger sibling and I received a brand new Sega Mega Drive for Christmas in 1992, my brother's friend Justin offered to swap his recently acquired SNES with us for a week. I wasn't keen on the idea as I was too addicted to *Streets of Rage* to give it up, but my brother had already agreed, and the swap was made. Like us, Justin only had a few games, and out of them it was *Magic Sword* that took all of my interest. As a fan of scrolling beat-'em-ups, it only seemed natural I would like it, but strangely I had never encountered it before, despite spending a lot of time in arcades.

The best part of *Magic Sword* was that it was quite unlike the style of brawler I was used to, fusing together a combination of a beat-'em-up, platformer, and RPG into one neat package. Learning to build HP, charge my magic meter, and reconfigure my battle tactics were key elements of this game that were previously quite alien to me. When it came to swapping our consoles back, I was pleased to return to my Mega Drive and *Streets of Rage* but couldn't help but hanker for a Sega port of *Magic Sword*. Such was the passion of my short affair with the game.
–Kieren Hawken

Schiffer Publishing LTD

The Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1992.

Although a tad short, *The Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse* is an adventurous, variety-filled cartridge that gamers of all ages can enjoy. During a game of catch, Pluto runs off, with Goofy giving chase and leaving Mickey worried and going to look for his dog pals. Slipping off the edge of a cliff, Mickey falls into a magical land where the evil Emperor Pete holds Pluto hostage. Even though he's told that Pete is invincible, Mickey vows to find his friends no matter what. Mickey must travel through six magical worlds (Treetops, Dark Forest, Fire Grotto, Pete's Peak, Snowy Valley, and Emperor Pete's Castle), jumping on bees, frogs, snakes, bats, fantasy creatures, and other enemies. Mickey will also open treasure chests, use gold coins to purchase special items, ride on giant cherries and moving platforms, use magic blocks to overcome obstacles and enemies, and more.

What separates the game from the pack is the ability for Mickey to find and wear three different costumes: the wizard's costume lets him launch bolts of magical energy; the fireman's costume enables him to release a powerful stream of water that can put out fires, battle enemies, and move certain blocks; and the mountaineer's costume gives him a grappling hook and rope for scaling steep cliffs. Other helpful items you can pick up include magic lamps (refill magic meter), fire hydrants (refill water meter), apples and blueberries (increase score), and hearts (refill health meter). Gorgeous graphics, delightful sounds, and marvelous gameplay make *Magical Quest* a nice addition to Capcom's cartoon canon.

Notable Quotable:

"Cartoon-like graphics filled with the magic of Disney-style animation accent this side-scrolling adventure. *Magical Quest* was a game of skill. Not much skill, but nonetheless cute. I think the game should have a wider variety of difficulty settings as an added challenge for gamers after puberty. Mickey was well-animated, as were all of the backgrounds. The gameplay was smooth and concise, but there was little depth to the game—this was to be expected, however, for the genre . . . Very good for young'uns and people out for a few kicks." –*Game Zero* (February 1993)

Insider Insight:

Capcom struck gold when they decided to make games with Disney licenses. There were many high-quality games across several systems, but one standout title for me is *The Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse*. There's a fantastic level of quality in this platformer, from the detailed and colorful sprites to the catchy music in each stage. Controls are solid, but there's no way to sprint unless you are running down a slope, which can create some odd-feeling jumps. Bosses, most of which have Pete's face, are top-notch.

Magical Quest is one of the more memorable SNES games I played as a kid of no more than ten years old. My cousin and I would spend many evenings glued to the screen, desperately trying to advance. Years later, we always talked about this wonderful game as one of the best. As adults, any time we got together, we played *Magical Quest*, which lead to my cousin finally finishing it after hours of attempts. That moment of triumph was unforgettable—one that I will always cherish. We both stood up in joy, jumping as we watched the credits roll, ignoring the laughter of my aunt from across the room. –Alex McCumbers

Insider Insight:

Playing *The Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse* was truly a magical experience back in 1992. I remember spending many a late night adventuring through the game's colorful levels, feeling like Capcom had finally made right on all the things Disney had given to Sega Genesis owners with *Castle of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse*. It seemed like they threw in some *Mega Man* as well.

Even as a kid, I felt like Capcom had tried to implement little touches of *Mega Man* into this Disney platformer, with Mickey taking on new powers with every boss he defeats, much like Mega Man does with his buster gun. The implementation of this outfit system gave the game a sense of depth that few platformers possessed. For me, *Magical Quest* did just as much for the platform genre as *Final Fantasy* did for the world of role-playing.

Magical Quest was the title that spurred my inner Disney geek into pleading with my parents for months to buy me a Super Nintendo console. Mario may have popularized the platformer, but *Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse* perfected the art form. As someone who was an adolescent during the golden age of platformers, it now pains me to see how far such a mighty genre of gaming has fallen from grace. –Anthony Frisina

Sniffer Publishing, LLC

Mario Is Missing!

PUBLISHER: The Software Toolworks.
DEVELOPER: The Software Toolworks.
GAME TYPE: Educational/Geography/ Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

In *Mario Is Missing!*, Luigi must rescue his famous brother from Bowser and the Koopas. This requires reading maps, reading pamphlets of famous landmarks, traveling by sewer pipes, exploring fifteen exotic cities (as opposed to twenty-five in the PC point-and-click version), jumping on Koopas to reveal stolen artifacts (which must be taken to their proper landmarks), interrogating locals, solving puzzles, retrieving facts and figures from a computer database, and answering such questions as "How long is the Great Wall?", "What is a boleadoras made of?", and "What does the Obelisk Monument honor?" You will also identify continents, countries, and cities in order to enlist Yoshi's aid. Once Luigi returns an artifact to its rightful owner, he can walk into an information booth and have his picture taken at the corresponding famous landmark.

The first game to feature only Luigi in the starring role, *Mario Is Missing!* is similar to its NES counterpart but with better graphics. It looks a bit like *Super Mario World*, but gameplay is educational in nature and geared toward younger players. The fact that Luigi can't lose a life is just one of many reasons *Mario Is Missing!* is limited in terms of sheer action.

Notable Quotable:

"Something you don't see every day—a polished and playable educational game . . . as long as you don't play it for too long. The puzzles and questions are all very knowledge-inducing, but after fifteen almost identical levels, wandering young minds may well have wandered away." –*Games Master* (September 1993)

Insider Insight:

Mario Is Missing! made me the most hated kid in school. At least the most hated gamer, anyway. In the minds and hearts of my classmates, admitting to playing this game and even enjoying it was a cardinal sin. I might as well have ripped off Mario's trademark mustache and painted his attire orange. *Mario Is Missing!* was hated because it did that thing gamers usually boo, even to this day, and that's educate.

What made it worse was how "sneaky" the game was about educating you. It played right into the hands of parents who wanted their kids to learn something outside of school. I can only imagine how many kids were mad that their parents tricked them with the, "Hey, I got you that new Mario game!" line, only to discover there is no true Mario, AND you were forced to learn and remember things. How dare you, '90s parents!

However, if you were a card-carrying, high water pants-wearing nerd like myself, *Mario Is Missing!* almost made it okay for you to want to know state and world capitals in the fourth grade, or run home to play your Vtech World Wizard.

Mario Is Missing! may not have earned me many friends, but it definitely created lots of fond memories. When you're an awkward, unorthodox child you gravitates towards games with the same personality, and with a focus on education (and less on stomping enemies), *Mario Is Missing!* and I were BFFs long before that was a thing. –Nick DeMarco

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Mario Paint

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Nintendo.
GAME TYPE: Art/Music, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

Packaged with the Super NES Mouse controller, *Mario Paint* is an ingenious art and music program that provides gamers with a variety of brushes, pens, colors (fifteen in all), pre-drawn backgrounds, and other tools for use in creating drawings, paintings, stamps, designs, and animations. There are seventy-five textures and backgrounds from which to choose, along with 120 stamps, and you can add shading and patterns with an airbrush and a "fill" paintbrush. Players can only save one completed work at a time, meaning many a masterpiece will bite the virtual dust, but the cartridge is nevertheless a lot of fun to toy around with. Musically, players can use pianos, horns, guitars, pig grunts, Yoshi noises, and other sounds to create original compositions, and you can add your soundtrack of sorts to your artistic works. Enterprising SNES owners can hook up their system to a stereo and save their audio creations via cassette tape, and they can record their art with a VCR. To "increase your Super NES Mouse dexterity," you can play a fast-action mini-game called *Gnat Attack*, where you guide a fly swatter around a grid, swatting flying bugs.

Notable Quotable:

"When you use the animation feature, you can really run wild. I remember creating short animations of cars or characters plunging off cliffs and exploding in a fiery inferno. Oh, the fun I had . . . I applaud Nintendo for making a bold and unconventional move with *Mario Paint* . . . It holds nostalgia value for me and was something I enjoyed playing with friends . . . If you are a collector and want to add something different to your collection, *Mario Paint* is definitely worth picking up, if for nothing more than to say you own a unique piece of video game history." –Josh Despain (www.defunctgames.com)

Insider Insight:

I thought *Mortal Kombat* was the most violent video game I would ever play. That was before my friends and I got ahold of *Mario Paint*. I'm not sure what drew me to the game, but I knew I had to have it the moment I heard about it. In the '80s, when I wasn't making flipbook animations, I had something called an Etch-a-Sketch Animator 2000, where you could animate a short story in pixel form. With *Mario Paint*, I was a little disappointed that you could only animate relatively few frames at a time. Still, thinking how creative I could get under these limitations, I decided to draw Link chopping with an axe, with a blood spurt as the axe landed on the final frame on whatever it was cutting. I animated him chopping random objects, from a human head to a pile of cats. To make it funnier, the soundtrack I provided was a happy tune that featured cats meowing. My friends and I were rolling on the floor, laughing at our masterful creation. The creativity was endless. I shudder to think what other people animated behind closed doors. –John Riggs

Sniffer Publishing, LTD

Mario's Early Years:
Fun With Letters

PUBLISHER: The Software Toolworks.
DEVELOPER: The Software Toolworks.
GAME TYPE: Educational/Spelling, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

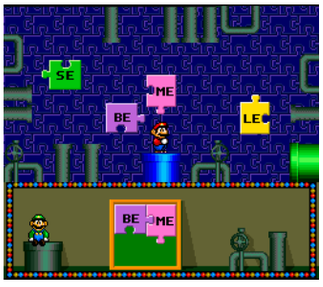
Designed with very young children in mind, *Mario's Early Years: Fun With Letters* takes place in seven different worlds: Alphabet World, Last Letter World, Vowel World, Building World, Sound World, Sentence World, and First Letter World. Each world features a series of point-and-click games designed to help youngsters learn their letters and words. You can play the game as Mario, Princess Toadstool, or Yoshi. When you point and click on an item, the computer tells you things like what the word or letter is or how it fits in a sentence. The items depicted include apples, pigs, caps, suns, and other common objects.

Below each playfield, with the exception of Alphabet World, Mario's brother Luigi lies sleeping. If you wake him up, this adds a new dimension to the game as the computer begins asking you to identify letters, fill in sentences, and perform other simple tasks related to words and letters. If you choose the incorrect word, letter, or object, the computer will gently tell you the name of what you chose and then repeat the question. You will then need to choose a different option.

While *Fun With Letters* is a decent teaching tool if supplemented with pencil, paper, and books, it is far from perfect in that it lacks a sense of adventure. The map screen shows Mario and the gang on a raft, getting ready to go to one of the island worlds, but within each world the games are static, and there is very little character animation. *Barney's Hide & Seek Game* for the Sega Genesis is not necessarily a better game overall, but it does offer more character movement and a feeling that one is going someplace. Compatible with the Super NES Mouse.

Fun Fact:
Yoshi is not a playable character in the PC version of *Mario's Early Years: Fun With Letters*.

Notable Quotable:
"Apparently the best they could get for voiceover was a five-year-old who slurs his words to the point of being occasionally indecipherable . . . Mario and Peach actually look like Mario and Peach . . . The game doesn't have much content, and the content that's there isn't really a game . . . There's no risk or reward involved in anything you choose . . . There's no progression and no end. How the hell is this supposed to teach kids anything when there're no penalties for wrong answers and no rewards for correct answers? Games like this got made because they knew parents would buy it with the intent of making their kids play an educational title, but this is the type of game that makes true edutainment look bad . . . This is blatant exploitation of a popular franchise for the sake of pulling a profit." –Gilly-thekid (YouTube)



Schiffer Publishing LTD

Mario's Early Years:
Fun With Numbers

PUBLISHER: The Software Toolworks.
DEVELOPER: The Software Toolworks.
GAME TYPE: Educational/Math, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

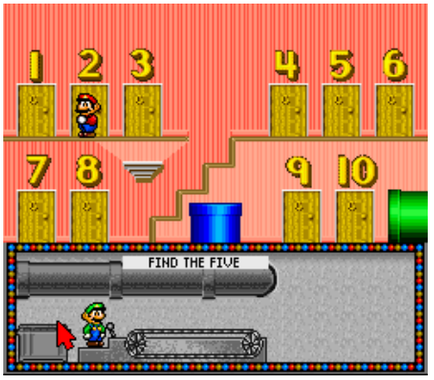
Mario's Early Years: Fun With Numbers takes place in seven worlds that are selectable from an overhead map of islands: Counting World, Number World, Comparing World, How Many World, Same and Different World, Shape World, and Sorting World. Each world features a series of point-and-click games designed to help young children learn their numbers and shapes. You can play the game as Mario, Princess Toadstool, or Yoshi. When you point and click on an item, the computer tells you things like what that item is, what shape that item is, or how many of that item there are. Below each playfield, with the exception of Counting World, Mario's brother Luigi lies sleeping. If you wake him up, this adds a new dimension to the game as the computer begins asking you to identify items, count items, and perform other simple tasks related to numbers and shapes. The items depicted include swings, shoes, beds, cookies, fish, and other common objects. Compatible with the Super NES Mouse.

Notable Quotable:

"For children well-versed in their usage of shapes and numbers, this game offers very little. The action is almost nonexistent. But those of speaking age who have not quite mastered these things will have a good time while educating themselves in the process." –All Game Guide (formerly at www.allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphical style is clearly inspired by *Super Mario World*, only not nearly as good, despite this being released a few years later . . . The music, like many Software Toolworks games, is pretty nice—good arrangements of the *Super Mario World* tunes . . . Even the youngest children will get nothing out of this dull and barely educational slop . . . It seems that many [developers] think that a character or icon recognized for being fun will make their product fun . . . The people who make these games are oftentimes not interested in making a fun or even educational game, just in turning a profit. [*Mario's Early Years: Fun With Numbers*] isn't a failed experiment, but rather apathy on the part of the designer." –Mike TheGamerGuy (YouTube)

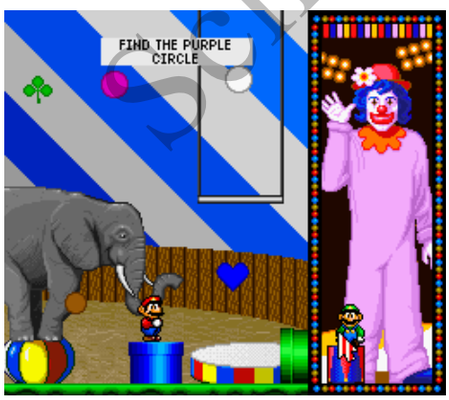


Source Publishing

Mario's Early Years:
Preschool Fun

PUBLISHER: Mindscape.
DEVELOPER: The Software Toolworks.
GAME TYPE: Educational, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Designed for children too young to know they'd probably rather be playing *Super Mario World*, *Mario's Early Years: Preschool Fun* lets Junior learn about shapes, differences and similarities, numbers, sounds, and other objects and concepts. Using the control pad or Super NES Mouse, players guide a pointer around the screen, pointing and clicking on an assortment of items in six different worlds. Mario, Yoshi, or Princess Toadstool is your child's guide through Shape World, Color World, Listening World, Opposite World, Counting World, and Body World. Within the various worlds are numerous activities. Your child can point to numbers to hear them counted, click on Mario's body parts to learn about the body and watch Mario move, match and sort colors, match shapes to corresponding objects, and much more.



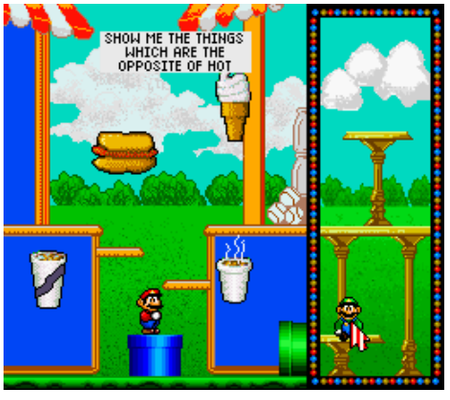
Fun Friend characters will show up from time to time when your child gives a correct response. Sometimes hidden Fun Friends will appear as if from nowhere when your child points and clicks on special areas of the screen. Shape World, Color World, Listening World, and Opposite World offer a Learning mode and a Discovery mode. While in Learning mode, the child will be asked by Luigi to perform specific tasks, such as locating a yellow circle or identifying a chicken. Counting World and Body World contain only the Discovery mode, which lets the child point and click on items just for fun and in random fashion.

Notable Quotable:

"Whilst the premise of *Mario's Early Years* definitely has good intentions, it lacks any form of life or energy to get the child remotely engaged . . . The voice-over speaks in a sarcastic dry manner, making the game's lack of effort sadly even more evident. *Mario's Early Years* has a slow pace, sucking out the potential fun the game could have truly had." –GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)

Notable Quotable:

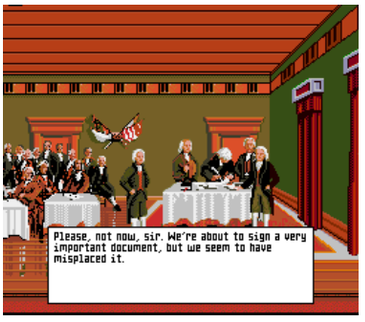
"A five-year-old child wouldn't enjoy picking up their toys, watching someone throw the toys all over the room, and then being told to pick them up again. That's essentially what this game does—'You clicked on all three of these shapes! Now do it again with these three different shapes!' If you want to find an educational video game for your children to learn with and have FUN while doing so, I cannot recommend this game. It's boring, uninspired, and repetitive. Don't let Mario's smiling face deceive you—the developers could have pasted the likenesses of the Sonic games or the Looney Tunes cast or the New York Mets in place of the Mario characters, and it would be the same—terrible." –Cut. Paste? Print! (cutpasteprint.wordpress.com)



Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Mario's Time Machine

PUBLISHER: The Software Toolworks.
DEVELOPER: The Software Toolworks.
GAME TYPE: Educational/History, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.



One of five Mario-related edutainment games for the SNES, *Mario's Time Machine* puts you in the role of the title character, traveling through time, answering a variety of history questions, and returning artifacts that were stolen by Bowser to their rightful owners. The action sequences in which players gather mushrooms and dodge sea urchins while cruising the surface of the ocean on a mini-surfboard—an element mercifully missing from the much different NES version, which features simplified *Mario Bros.* and *Super Mario Bros.*-style platforming—are dreadfully dull. This is basically a fill-in-the-blank trivia game covering such otherwise interesting topics as Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson, Plato, Marco Polo, Cleopatra, and Shakespeare. You can select from a list of multiple choice answers for each question, which is nice because most younger players won't know the majority of the answers.

Notable Quotable:

"This edutainment game has good audio and visuals, but it's too short and highly linear. Most kids will play through it once or twice. Best for family and classroom use." –*Game Players* (January 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"The idea of Mario traveling through time could make for a compelling game . . . *Mario's Time Machine* at least feels like it could be educational to young audiences, which is something *Mario is Missing!* can't boast. The problem, though, is that the game lacks any shred of depth." –Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)

Insider Insight:

Mario's Time Machine was a follow-up to the amazing *Super Mario World*, and I thought it was going to be the next game in the series. After all, the title alone seemed exciting and instantly made me think of the H.G. Wells classic, *The Time Machine*. However, all I had seen about the game were the rather strange ads in the magazines—I never actually saw a review. Even as bizarre as the ads looked, my siblings and I had high hopes for the game.

Unfortunately, when we rented the game and started to play, we were disappointed almost immediately. If there was one genre of video games kids avoided like the plague, it was education. What kid wanted to take something that should be fun and make it about school? Further, the game lacked imagination, and there was very little creativity poured into the design, despite the fact that it blended an awful lot of fiction with the history.

Still, my siblings and I tried to enjoy it as we refused to let our weekend rental go to waste. We searched and searched, trying to make something fun out of the stripped-down, bland mess that was this game. Any actual fun was found in the portal section—Mode 7 graphics were always a good choice when it game to Super Nintendo games. This was easily the most entertaining part of the game. As odd as it was that you had to surf to reach a whirlpool to time travel, this didn't seem so bizarre during the '90s.

It's funny to look back at my dislike for *Mario's Time Machine*, considering I am one of the few gamers that actually liked *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* on the NES, which was about as historically accurate. *Mario's Time Machine* proves that even Mario has his bad days. –Zoe K. Howard

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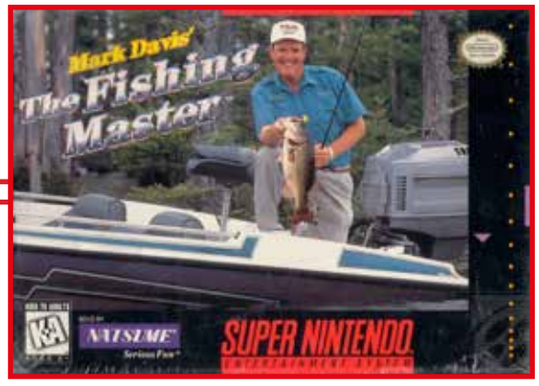
Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Mark Davis' The Fishing Master

PUBLISHER: Natsume.
DEVELOPER: Natsume.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Fishing, 1 player.
YEAR: 1996.



Endorsed by expert angler Mark Davis, this game is similar to *Super Black Bass*. After selecting from one of five main fishing areas on an overhead map, players cast their line from a behind-the-fisherman perspective. Once the reel has been cast, the bottom half of the screen changes to an underwater view of the action. Prior to fishing, you visit the tackle shop, where you can purchase rods, reels, bait, and the like. There are sixteen different lures you can use, including spinner bait, straight worm, and Texas rig. The fishing is fairly detailed, letting you cast your line and reel in the lure, being careful not to move the bait too quickly. If your line gets caught on an obstruction underwater, you can cut it. If the bass you catch is less than twelve inches, you have to throw it back.

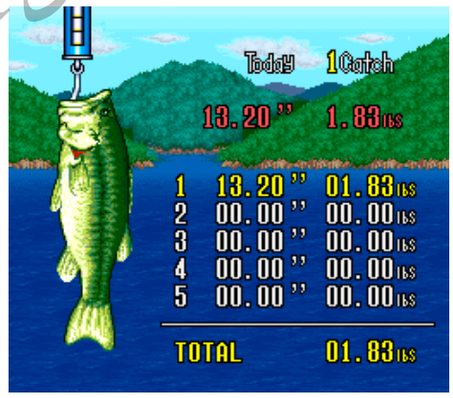
At the end of the day, your five largest fish will be weighed and the total displayed on the screen. Your fishing data will include travel time, fishing time, casting, hooking, keepers, non-keepers, escaped, and lost lures. To progress to the next round in Tournament Mode, you must place in the top ten, and variable conditions are chosen for you. In Free Mode, you can select the season, weather, wind direction, and time of day. Known as *Oomono Black Bass Fishing: Jinzouko-Hen* in Japan.

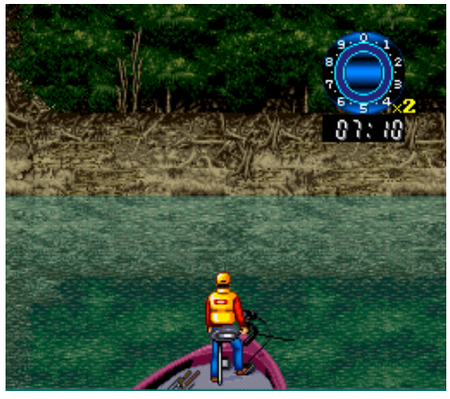
Notable Quotable:
"I know fishing requires patience, but my patience ran out with this one. The game needs more fishing animation in regard to reeling in your fish or just fish swimming in the water. Plus, finding where the fish are is not really user-friendly. An advanced sonar could really help here. The game needs to be more realistic." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1996)

Notable Quotable:
"For all purposes fun and entertaining, *Mark Davis' The Fishing Master* fails entirely to capture the true challenge of fishing. And while the initial setup is impressively thorough, offering your choice of seasons, gear, the time of day, and location, the actual gameplay mechanics lack realism and make the game less than exciting to play." –*Next Generation* (February 1996)

Mark Davis

1995 Bass Master Classic Champion
1995 Bass Angler of the Year





Screenshot Publishing, LLC

Marvel Super Heroes in War of the Gems

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
YEAR: 1996.

Loosely based on Marvel's *Infinity Gauntlet* comic book series, *War of the Gems* lets you play as one of five popular heroes (brought together by Adam Warlock), each with his own special moves, which are executed by pulling off *Street Fighter II*-style button combinations. Said heroes include Captain America (charging star, shield slash), Iron Man (double jump, repulsor, air repulsor, shell crush, smart bomb), Wolverine (wall climb, rising claw, running claw, diving slash), Spider-Man (wall climb, web shooter, web wire), and The Incredible Hulk (grab throw, Hulk tackle, rock crush). In addition, each character has a gem power move, such as Wolvie's berzerker, which lets him shoot bolts of claw energy, and Spidey's web throw, which tangles up his opponents and tosses them to the ground. By finding gems, heroes can boost their abilities.

Characters differ in other ways as well, examples being Hulk's lumbering gait and Spidey's awesome agility. Unlike *X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse*, which this game resembles, you can select any character to play any level. The objective is to thwart Thanos, who is intent on conquering the world by gathering all six Infinity Gems. You'll battle evil alter-egos of such heroes as Deathlok, Hawkeye, the Thing, and Thor, along with such villains as Blackheart, Dr. Doom, and Magus. There's plenty of platforming as well, replete with such activities as riding moving platforms and dodging spikes (probably the most common obstacle in all of video games). Levels of play include: Boston Aquarium, Amazon, Alaska, Dr. Doom's Castle, Spaceship, Asteroid Belt, Arizona Power Plant, Mt. Vesuvius, Egypt, and Fortress of Thanos. Plus, you can practice in the Avenger's Training Center.

Notable Quotable:

"The gameplay itself is quite challenging. One such instance is on the Amazon level, where you take on a quartet of Hawkeye doppelgangers that are also shooting arrows at you from various platforms at once. This is where it is crucial to learn the moves of each character to get an upper hand . . . The game boasts a twenty-one-track soundtrack that is very drum heavy, with a lot of complex rolls and fills that sometimes sound as if Neil Peart from Rush was asked to come in and help write. Like most soundtracks that come from Capcom, it won't disappoint and has just the right tempo to fit the action of each respective stage or boss fight . . . This is a great game that doesn't get much attention, likely due to Marvel and Capcom's later releases. If you're a fan of Capcom's style, Marvel Comics, beat-'em-ups, or fighting games, this is a must-play." –Michael Mygind (lasttokengaming.com)

Insider Insight:

Years ago there was nothing that would have made me happier than playing a licensed Marvel Capcom game that was a spiritual sequel to the terrific *X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse*. In late 1996, however, when *Marvel Super Heroes: War of the Gems* was released, about the only reason that I was excited to rent it was because it was one of the three interesting Super Nintendo games left to come out, along with *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* and *Donkey Kong Country 3*.

That's not to say that *Marvel Super Heroes* is not good. Rather, it's just that after a generation of similar brawlers, and after briefly sampling the majesty that is *Super Mario 64* for the Nintendo 64 at my local Walmart, it was hard for me to get excited about another side-scrolling platformer punch fest. It didn't help that at the time I had more love for the X-Men than heroes like Captain America, Hulk, and Iron Man (something that has changed now that I've become a much more serious comic book collector).

What I'll always remember most about this game is getting to the last boss, Thanos, and using all of my characters up, save for the Hulk, who was my least favorite. My brother's friend, who was visiting at the time, came in and asked if he could have a try, to which I had no objection. Controlling Hulk, he beat Thanos on his first try.

What's interesting about looking back at the game is that for however indifferent I was to it at the time, if they announced a game now that featured the likes of Spider-Man, Iron Man, and Captain America teaming up to collect Infinity Gems and culminating in a fight with Thanos, it would be a game-of-the-year contender for me. –Blair Farrell

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: BITS Studios.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Based on Kenneth Branagh's 1994 feature film of the same name, which in turn was based on the 1818 novel, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* puts players in control of the famous lumbering, shuffling brute, trudging through six levels of play, including a dark and foreboding crypt, the cholera-infested streets of Ingolstadt, the frozen tundra of the Arctic, a creepy swamp, and the Frankenstein House. The monster's goal is to make peace with his existence and find the mad scientist who abandoned him shortly after his "birth."

As the Frankenstein monster works his way through the game, jumping on platforms (Franky can jump ridiculously high), riding moving platforms, pulling levers, pushing blocks to make ledges appear and disappear, dodging falling chandeliers and other obstacles, and finding hidden pathways and clues, he will use a staff and bolts of electricity to ward off dogs, bats, giant spiders, leeches, soldiers, sailors, and other enemies. Unfortunately, shooting electricity reduces the creature's life bar. Worse, the controls are clunky, and the labyrinthine levels are more of a chore than a pleasure to navigate. Despite a nice intro, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* is as lifeless and as plodding as the monster. Also released for the Genesis. The Sega CD version is much different.

Memories:
While I'll admit that this game is awful, I enjoyed the movie—which followed in the wake of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992)—more than most critics and monster fans. Kenneth Branagh, who also directed the film, was a bit of a crybaby as Dr. Frankenstein, and the New York-accented Robert De Niro was an odd choice to play the monster, but overall it's a pretty good adaptation of the classic novel. I remember buying the movie on VHS at Suncoast Motion Picture Company while wearing a *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* T-shirt—I didn't even realize it until the store clerk pointed it out. Yep, I can be as geeky about horror movies as I can about video games.

Notable Quotable:
"Frankenstein's monster was one seriously miserable bastard, and thanks to this game, you can be one, too! *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* is one of the most deplorable platformers I've had to endure. The first stage is set in a village during a rainstorm, which seems like a reasonable place for the monster to be on the prowl. Unfortunately, the manner in which he limps around in that cloak makes him look like an *old woman trying to catch a bus*, for crying out loud! And when he stoops down to smack kids in the ankles with his cane, it just looks pathetic. Considering his haggard walk, it's quite a revelation when he leaps about ten feet in the air! Due to poor jumping controls, you tend to either over-jump or hit your head on something and fall short. And there is no rhyme or reason to the switches. Pulling one might trigger something in a different part of the stage, but *who the [expletive] knows*?! . . . The music is pretty good, but not in a scary way, and *that's a problem*! . . . No human could withstand the pain of seeing this one through to the bitter end." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Retro Gamer Publishing LTD

The Mask

PUBLISHER: Black Pearl Software.
DEVELOPER: Black Pearl Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

Based on the amusingly over-the-top feature film from 1994, *The Mask* puts gamers in the role of Stanley Ipkiss, who finds a magical mask that grants him wacky super powers. Donning giant buckteeth, a grinning green face, and a bright yellow suit, Ipkiss punches bad guys and uses a variety of morph powers, including tornado (plough through enemies), mallet (conk enemies, break through the floor in certain places), super jump, guns, horn (smack all the bad guys on the screen), and zip (move at super speed). Using powers burns morph energy, but you can replace it by grabbing green "M" icons.

Perilous platform jumping is plentiful, in addition to such activities as ducking, bouncing on sofas, riding elevators, entering doors, transporting through vents, flipping switches, doing power slides, searching for hidden items (cash, jewelry, energy, extra lives), and sneaking past closed doors and jail cells in order to avoid disturbing cranky occupants. The game features seven levels of play: Stanley's Apartment, The Streets of Edge City, Edge City Bank, Landfill Park, Edge City Jail House, Sewers, and The Congo Bongo Club. Includes special appearances by Milo the Dog and Cuban Pete, who are characters from the film.

Notable Quotable:
"*The Mask* originated as a violent and humorous Dark Horse comic series, but then devolved into a horrible movie and an even worse game." –*Game Informer Magazine* (July 2000)

Notable Quotable:
"The animation of *The Mask* really impressed me, and you are given enough weapons to take out your enemies. However, the annoying music and enemies are lame. The first level will make many players lose their bearing of where they have been and need to go. Overall, it is a good game in its own right, but there are similar games out on the market." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1995)

Insider Insight:
Every generation seemingly has their comedy superstar, and if you were a child during the '90s, chances are that person for you was Jim Carrey. Given that in the lifespan of the SNES virtually no license was off the table (just look at games like *Home Improvement* and *The Blues Brothers*), I'm surprised no one rushed out an *Ace Ventura* game where you have to save animals from evil dog catchers and poachers. Instead, the only game we got based on a Jim Carrey movie, other than *Batman Forever*, was *The Mask*.

Unlike a lot of licensed movie games that were hastily thrown together to piggyback off the hype of a film release, *The Mask* for the SNES came out well over a year after the movie was in theaters. Admittedly, I thought that *The Mask* was one of the weaker Jim Carrey efforts and didn't bother to play the SNES game until many years after its release. It turns out that I wasn't missing much—even with time to craft the game free of a deadline, *The Mask* plays just like any other throwaway licensed game, complete with poor hit detection, confusing level design, and cheap deaths.

What's most fascinating about *The Mask*, though, is not the game, but its applicable *Nintendo Power* contest. I picked up an issue of the magazine around the time of the release of the game, and it featured a sweepstakes contest where the prize was a part in *The Mask 2*, a film that never happened (we'll ignore *Son of The Mask*).

I always wondered what happened to that prize winner, and in 2015 the story of Nathan Runk, the then-twelve-year-old who won the prize, came to light. Though he never got to meet Jim Carrey, Nathan walked away with a film crew jacket, a stack of THQ games, and $5,000. I guess something good did come from *The Mask*, at least for one person anyway. –Blair Farrell

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Math Blaster Episode 1

PUBLISHER: Davidson & Associates.
DEVELOPER: Western Technologies.
GAME TYPE: Educational/Math, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Recommended for children ages six to twelve *Math Blaster Episode 1* is a watered down version of the 1993 computer game, *Math Blaster: In Search of Spot*, which is part of a series that began with *Math Blaster!* (1986). The evil Trash Alien has abducted robot dog Spot and littered the universe with garbage, spurring Blasternaut into action. The cart is divided into three mini-games connected by cutscenes. In Trash Zapper, players look through the view screen of a space ship, blasting pieces of trash containing the correct number. In Cave Runner, Blasternaut uses his jet pack to fly through a cave, avoiding lava bombs and force fields while carrying code numbers to place between numbers on either side of cave gaps. In Math Blaster, which depicts the Trash Alien's large, hovering flying saucer, Blasternaut must fly into portholes containing the correct answers to the equations given. The game features problems in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, but the Number Recycler level from the PC version is not included, nor is the Editor mode. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"I have always loved the Math Blaster series, partly because it is so much more action-oriented than many other educational games . . . Amazingly, the game features a fully voiced introduction . . . The first stage [is] slightly frustrating with a controller because it was so obviously meant to be played on the computer with a mouse. This leaves the crosshairs just a little too slow for what you're trying to do, but just slightly. They actually did a good job programming both the speed and responsiveness of the crosshairs to make it work as best they could with the d-pad. The only other complaint is that Blasternaut is somewhat difficult to control when using his jetpack; he just doesn't have the right weight to him you would expect . . . It's not a very graphically intense game, but everything was handled very well . . . The first stage in particular has a lot of little details . . . things like Blasternaut turning the controls along with you when you're moving the crosshairs, and his thumb pressing the button every time you fire . . . those asteroids looked almost three dimensional . . . It's a very short game . . . But with all the different difficulty settings as well as the fact that so many things are randomly generated, it actually has a lot of replay value." –Deadpark (www.deadpark.com)

Peter Publishing LTD

Maui Mallard in Cold Shadow

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Disney Interactive.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1996.

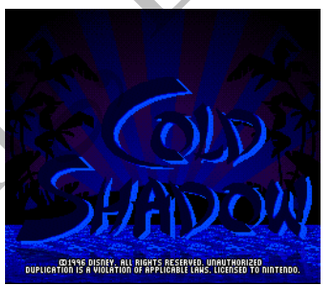
Maui Mallard puts players in the title role of Donald Duck as an adventurer/private detective on a tropical island mission to recover a lost idol. Maui/Donald, who can run, jump, and duck (of course), is equipped with a bug gun for fending off spiders, piranha, rotting pirates, duck zombies, Amazon warriors, and other enemies. You can combine bugs for more firepower. Maui can also transform into staff-wielding Ninja Maui, who can swing, climb, perform a spin move, and pull off a Tempest of a Thousand Blows attack.

To help complete your journey, which the back of the box for the game says will last forty hours, you can grab a firefly for lighting dark corridors, tropical punch for refilling your health, yin-yang coins for a power boost, golden Maui tokens for extra lives, mojo dolls for continues, treasure to access bonus levels (completing bonus levels earns passwords), and zombie powder bags for increasing the size of your health meter. The smooth, fun, beautifully illustrated, puzzle-enhanced action takes Maui through a volcano, a sunken ship, and other exotic locales. Levels include: Crackin' the Gate of the Mojo Mansion, At the Ninja Training Grounds, MudDrake Mayhem, Sacrifice of Maui, Test of Duckwood, Sunken Flying Duckman, Realm of the Dead, Mojo Stronghold, and Babaluau, Baby.

The game premiered in North America at Walt Disney World in September of 1996. Thanks to Nintendo securing exclusive publishing rights for the game, the original Genesis/Mega Drive version, which was called *Donald in Maui Mallard* (1995), was only released in Brazil and Europe. Eventually, a Genesis version hit the U.S., but only through the Sega Channel. Interestingly, the SNES version removes all references to the name "Donald Duck."

Notable Quotable:
"This game took me back to the days when 16-bit systems were at the top of the line. *Maui Mallard* has all the qualities of a great side-scroller. The graphics aren't rendered like *Donkey Kong Country*, and that makes it even more like the olden days. The levels are great—sometimes seeming like they'll never end." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1997)

Notable Quotable:
"The graphics, animation, and crisp control are right up there with the best of the Super Nintendo's platform games. This probably comes as no surprise from a Disney game—but this time the overall level of quality far exceeds their previous efforts. While *Maui Mallard* doesn't deviate too far from other action platform games in terms of play mechanics, it never stops being a blast to play. If you've been looking for a *Raiders of the Lost Ark* type of game, this duck will surely fit the bill." –All Game Guide (formerly at www.allgame.com)



Schiffer Publishing LTD

Mecarobot Golf

PUBLISHER: ToHo.
DEVELOPER: Advance Communication Company.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Golf, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
YEAR: 1993.

Plagued by choppy animation, poor controls, pitiful ball physics, and uninspired characters—a lame robot named "Eagle" and a clean-cut family of three—*Mecarobot Golf* is one of the weaker golfing games of the era. A Driving Range and a Lesson Mode, where players can improve their maximum yardage and their handicap and eventually get promoted from duffer status, "complement" the standard Competition Mode, but none are worth the effort, especially when compared to a game like *PGA Tour Golf*. The golfing action employs the traditional three-click method: one button press to start the swing, one to set the maximum power, and one to hit the ball straight or a little to the left or right. You can select from four sets of clubs.

Despite the robotic title, *Mecarobot Golf* has a pedestrian vibe, especially since the robot has no special skills. The storyline, in which the sponsors for Eagle's creators buy him a golf course called the Hyper Golf Club, adds very little to the "excitement." The Japanese version, known as *Serizawa Nobuo no Birdie Try*, was endorsed by professional golfer Nobuo Serizawa.

Notable Quotable:

"The SNES hardware's unique Mode 7 was useful for rendering backgrounds in zooming, rotating perspective, but its fundamental flatness doesn't suit this golf game very well. The software uses interrupt-driven parameter changes to lend some rolling inclination to the green, but the display changes so slowly when the ball is in flight that all of the technique's low-resolution, non-anti-aliased chunkiness shows. It's not that the green looks bad, so much as that it looks out of place next to the relatively detailed golfers and GUI [graphical user interface] elements . . . Things improve a bit when we get to the putting green—the course layout is nicely done without obvious tiling, and the putting interface works well, with a similar three-press mechanic. The display zooms in for a close-up when we're close to the hole, with a nice digitized ball-in sound, and it's easy to just miss the putt if we're too hasty with our actions . . . *Mecarobot Golf* is not bad—it's generic, but comprehensive, with a variety of holes to play and clubs to use, and it plays acceptably well." –Gaming After 40 (gamingafter40.blogspot.com)

Jennifer Publishing, LTD

MechWarrior

PUBLISHER: Activision.
DEVELOPER: Beam Software.
First-Person Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Based on the 1989 FASA PC title of the same name, which was the first video game in the BattleTech series, *MechWarrior* for the SNES has updated graphics, including Mode 7 rotation and scaling effects, but the PC game has better controls. The story is different as well. The year is 3027. You play as Herras Ragen, a freelance MechWarrior intent on destroying the Dark Wing Lance, a renegade mercenary cartel. You view the action from the cockpit of your mech. The lower 1/3 of the screen shows readouts (radar scope, status display, weapons monitor, and target monitor) while the upper 2/3 shows the battlefield, where you use a gun sight to target enemies and an assortment of weapons (missiles, machine guns, lasers, and a particle cannon) to shoot enemies.

Missions vary from locating and collecting items to protecting bases to locating and destroying enemy bases. Prior to each mission, you can negotiate your fee. In addition to battling enemies, you will visit Club Zero-Zero (for news and tips), General HeadQuarters (for mission assignments), and the 'Mech Complex (for buying, selling, customizing, and repairing mechs). Strategy plays more of a role than in most shooters. Known in Japan as *Battletech*.

Notable Quotable:

"This game really gets you into the action . . . outstanding in that it captures the virtuality of the environment, while maintaining a fast-paced, engage-and-destroy mission that will keep you addicted for hours . . . a potentially complicated game [that is] very easy to figure out . . . Turn your stereo or TV up loud. The battles are noisy—from the clamoring of metal on the ground to the blasts of missiles and particle cannons, it's full-tilt war every step of the way . . . the game itself is way too easy for the first two months of the simulated campaign . . . I would've liked the difficulty turned up a notch. Otherwise, this is a very good game . . . a must for battle action fans!" –Joe Santulli (*Digital Press* fanzine #10, March/April, 1993)

Scrifter Publishing LTD

MechWarrior 3050

PUBLISHER: Activision.
DEVELOPER: Tiburon Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: Action Strategy/Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Essentially the same game as *BattleTech: A Game of Armored Combat* for the Genesis, *MechWarrior 3050* is viewed from an isometric perspective, a jarring change from the first-person action of the original *MechWarrior*. Players control a Madcat Heavy OmniMech as it walks fairly quickly (for a mech) around five huge, nicely detailed planets (including snowy plains, deserts, and jungles), laying waste to buildings, tanks, gun turrets, mines, armored battle troops, defensive mechs, hovercraft, helicopters, and more. There's also rough terrain to avoid, including volcanic vents and spike-lined walls.

Prior to entering battle, players strategically select three weapons (including lasers, cannons, guns, and missiles) out of an armament of nine. In two-player mode, one gamer guides the mech while the other handles weaponry. The thin plotline finds you in the thirty-first century, facing a galaxy under attack by "massive 70-ton BattleMechs." Based on FASA's *BattleTech* tabletop game. Followed by *MechWarrior 2: 31st Century Combat* (PlayStation, Saturn).

Notable Quotable:

"When you're in a MechWarrior raising hell across the galaxy, who needs a story? Not me, and neither should you. When I was a kid, all I knew was that I controlled a giant robot, and someone was gonna die . . . So many weapons—there are twenty-seven different combinations of pain. The only combination I needed was number twelve: a laser, homing missiles, and a flamethrower. Yeah, I know, the game calls it a 'missile' that leaves flame trails, but I never saw a missile. All I saw was the damage I caused, and I caused a lot of it in the game's five different worlds . . . *MechWarrior 3050* does have garden-variety levels, but the ice world is still pretty cool . . . Tiburon actually knew how to make a fun game before they got pigeonholed into making sports titles . . . Kind of reminds me of *Jungle Strike*, minus all the waiting around and all the cutscenes. But in *MechWarrior 3050*, you can step on people and they explode. Can a helicopter do that? I don't think so!" –ScrewAttack (YouTube)

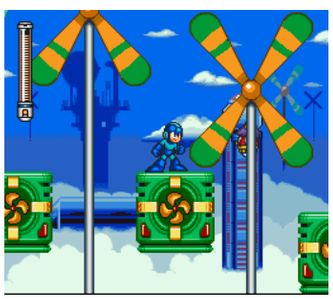
Retro Publishing LTD

Mega Man 7

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

The main Mega Man series continues from the NES to the Super NES with *Mega Man 7*, in which the evil Dr. Wily escapes from jail while his robots attack via remote control. The game takes place six months after *Mega Man 6*, with players once again guiding the iconic Blue Bomber of the title, who can move and shoot left and right, climb up and down ladders, jump on platforms, and slide. After working his way through a level, blasting wave after wave of cartoonish robots with his patented buster gun, Mega Man must battle one of Dr. Wily's Robot Masters in order to defeat him and take his Master Weapon. There are eight Robot Masters (bosses), each with a Master Weapon: Freeze Man (freeze cracker), Junk Man (junk shield), Burst Man (danger wrap), Cloud Man (thunder bolt), Spring Man (wild coil), Slash Man (slash claw), Shade Man (noise crush), and Turbo Man (scorch wheel). Each Robot Master is vulnerable to a specific Master Weapon you'll acquire.

Instead of you getting to fight the Robot Masters in any order like in the previous games in the series, only four stages are selectable in the beginning, and you must first play an introductory level. After completing the first four stages, you must beat the intermission Robot Museum stages, and then the other four stages will become selectable. Stage themes/environments vary from dinosaurs to zombies to lava to snow to underwater to up in the air. The game introduces Bass (along with his robotic wolf, Treble), who acts as a mini-boss and Mega Man's robot rival. Mega Man's robotic bird Beat, returning from *Mega Man 5* and *Mega Man 6*, has a new job: to carry Mega Man out of pits he falls into. Rush the canine also returns. Mega Man can ride on Rush's back to get across dangerous areas or bounce on his back to reach high places. Mega Man can find helpful items in the stages or purchase them with bolts (in-game currency you can grab) at Eddie's Cybernetic Support Shop.



Mega Man 7, known as *Rockman 7: Shukumei no Taiketsu!* in Japan, is also available for the PlayStation 2, GameCube, and Xbox via the *Mega Man Anniversary Collection*. The main Mega Man series continued on the PlayStation and Saturn with *Mega Man 8* and on the PlayStation 3, Wii, and Xbox 360 with *Mega Man 9* and *Mega Man 10*.

Notable Quotable:

"The core of *Mega Man 7* is largely the same as the preceding six chapters . . . That's not necessarily a complaint . . . The Robot Masters of *Mega Man 7* are not the strongest of the series . . . Many are recycled riffs on classic Robot Masters . . . The best of the bunch is Slash Man, which isn't that divorced from Cut Man, but the weapon he drops from Mega Man—the Slash Claw—is one of the best upgrades in the game . . . *Mega Man 7* took advantage of the SNES to overhaul the general look of the franchise. While Mega Man, Dr. Light, and other characters are still instantly recognizable, the jump to 16-bit results in much larger sprites and a fantastic new color palette. Not only is Mega himself larger, but so are the enemies. This lead to some consternation in some corners, as the larger sprites cut down on the remaining real estate and made some of the precision movements tougher. I'm not necessarily bothered by the increased sprite size, especially since the art direction for the regular enemies and the backdrops is so strong . . . *Mega Man 7* is one of the weaker entries in the original series. The come-down from the first three games—which still feel fresh and exciting—is palpable, even though *Mega Man 7* tries to inject the game with a handful of new features. Some work, like the addition of Auto's shop and the new items. Some don't, like the decision to limit the number of robot masters at the beginning of the game." –Levi Buchanan (www.ign.com)

Insider Insight:
Mega Man X was nothing short of a revelation, but for me what it did most was make me wonder what the traditional Mega Man series would look like on the SNES. So when *Mega Man 7* finally landed at my local Electronics Boutique, I went straight out and bought it, no rental needed. I loved how the creators managed to maintain that soulless expression on Mega Man's face while effectively modernizing everything else around him, including the crazy stuff they did with the environments. Using Turbo Man's power to burn down the trees in Slash Man's stage? Making the *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* music play during Shade Man's stage? And how in the intro stage when that steamroller thing shot its Mohawk at you? How cool was that? And then there was The Robot Museum! I must have entered that password to get there a hundred times just so I could walk around and stare at all those classic robot masters in their glass containers. And that medley of Guts Man, Heat Man, and Snake Man's music? Absolutely killer! –Kris Randazzo

Sniffer Publishing LLC

Mega Man Soccer

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Soccer, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Released after *Mega Man 6* (NES) and before *Mega Man 7* (SNES), *Mega Man Soccer* takes the titular hero out of his traditional platform shooter environment and lets him get his kicks with nineteen other robots from the series, including Bubble Man, Cut Man, Elec Man, Fire Man, Flash Man, Ice Man, and Pharaoh Man. Each robot, playing such positions as forward, halfback, fullback, goalie, or sweeper, has a nigh unstoppable special attack from the Mega Man series (the ball can become an ice slasher, a fireball, etc.), along with various standard moves: pass, lob, shoot, slide tackle, shoulder tackle, and header, the last of which works surprisingly well. A close-up, overhead view of the arcade-style action necessitates a small, *Defender*-like radar screen showing the entire field. The game features four modes of play: Exhibition, Capcom Championship, Tournament, and League. You can select from nine different teams, each with its own themed soccer field, or you can create your own squad. Known in Japan as *Rockman's Soccer*.

Notable Quotable:

"Without a doubt the most interesting character crossover in sports gaming history. Capcom took the Mega Man mythos and built a soccer game around it, complete with Dr. Wily's best robots to do battle with. The Capcom Championship mode has as much narrative as you'll find in a sports game, and you even select your opponents as you would select a stage in the regular Mega Man games. Each robot has its own ratings and a special shot, bringing variety to the game, especially in the exhibition mode where you can customize your team with a mishmash of enemies on each soccer line. *Mega Man Soccer* is easy to pick up and enjoy, especially with a friend." –Mr. Retro Sports (retrowaretv.com)

Insider Insight:

Even as a 16-bit console fan and a dedicated Mega Man collector, I had a hard time wrapping my head around *Mega Man Soccer*. It exists in a weird spot in the timeline for the franchise as a whole. *Mega Man X* came out in January of 1994 in North America, while *Mega Man 6* was released for NES two months later. *Mega Man Soccer* only made this situation worse with a retail release that came after both, with a plot that chronologically places the events of the game after *Mega Man 4*, a game released back in 1992!

Here's the other problem—you've got this badass robot who goes around blasting other evil robots and then collecting their powers to upgrade his capabilities. Mega Man was like a less creepy version of Sylar from *Heroes* who regretted having to fight and destroy other robots, even though they were harming the world and humanity. That's awesome. Now he's kicking a ball around a field? Huh? And you can use your special attack to incapacitate the goalie and score? That doesn't even seem sportsmanlike, let alone a good premise. The A.I. of the computer opponents sucks anyway, so it's not like you'll even need to use special attacks.

Nobody really wanted this game. No, that's not true—somebody at Capcom wanted this, and clearly they thought someone in Japan wanted it as well. They faithfully ported it to the U.S., but nobody I knew in the 1990s was really into soccer. "Mega Man Basketball" would have been a much better premise for a game. At least *Mega Man Soccer* set the precedent for the "numbered" series continuing on SNES after the NES's demise, which led to *Mega Man 7* more than a year later. –Steve Juon

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Mega Man X

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Mega Man, Capcom's iconic hero, makes his 16-bit debut. Set one hundred years after the storyline of the 8-bit Mega Man games, *Mega Man X* puts players in the role of the title character, a faster, more technologically advanced android who thinks like a human. Gameplay sticks to the tried-and-true formula, where you shoot right and left and jump on platforms, but you can now cling to walls, switch to a different weapon without pausing, and commandeer a Ride Armor vehicle that can walk, dash, jump, and punch. You can also find armor upgrades that let you charge your weapons, break certain blocks by hitting them from below, reduce your damage by half, or perform a fast dash.

As in previous games in the series, you progress through each themed level in the order of your choosing. The fight is against the Reploids, which are androids created by Dr. Cain, who used Dr. Light's design notes to replicate X. Defeating the boss (i.e. Maverick Reploid) in each level grants you a new weapon, such as an electric spark, a homing torpedo, or a fire wave, and each boss is particularly vulnerable to one of those weapons. Bosses include Armored Armadillo (shoots laser balls, curls up into a ball), Boomer Kuwanger (throws his headpiece like a boomerang), Chill Penguin (spits ice balls, creates sculptures with his breath), Flame Mammoth (spits flaming balls of oil), Launch Octopus (fires torpedoes underwater), Spark Mandrill (fights with his fists), Sting Chameleon (launches spikes), and Storm Eagle (flies, spits eggs). Known in Japan as *Rockman X*, *Mega Man X* was ported to the GameCube and PlayStation 2 via the *Mega Man X Collection*. Remade for the PSP as *Mega Man Maverick Hunter X*.

Notable Quotable:

"This game portrays Mega Man X as actually possessing emotions that older games couldn't really touch . . . X is tormented by his need to fight but having no desire to do so . . . *Mega Man X* started off a brand new popular series, and it did so with quite a bang. It detached itself as being more than just a spin-off of *Mega Man* with its unique personality and darker themes while keeping the core gameplay of its predecessors intact . . . *Mega Man X* is a refreshing take on the formula . . . As far as Mega Man games go, it hardly qualifies as the most difficult (it's actually one of the easiest ones to complete), but it could also be a great place to start for Rockman Newbies." –Random Access (randomacc.net)

Insider Insight:

As a die-hard fan of the NES Mega Man series, I had my reservations about the Blue Bomber's first foray into the 16-bit era. However, my apprehensions were quickly assuaged the first time I fired up *Mega Man X* on my Super Nintendo. While I had naturally anticipated the obvious leap in graphics, I was pleasantly surprised by the gameplay. It offered the perfect mix of the familiar peppered with a number of interesting new features, such as the ability to ascend walls (by jumping up them) and the speed dash. The challenge level of the boss robots was definitely stepped up as well.

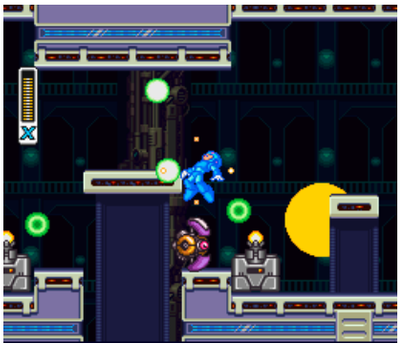
It was no longer simply a matter of finding the right weapon to take down a given level boss, but also adapting to their attack patterns and devising effective counterattacks. Being chased around a confined space by the lightsaber-wielding Maverick uber-boss, Sigma, was a new all-time geek-out high for me as an early teen, and even more so once I figured out how to take him out! Throw in the engaging dystopian future storyline and the always-inspiring Capcom soundtrack, and I was happily hooked for many months locating bonus items and armor upgrades while refining my boss battling strategies. Without a doubt, *Mega Man X* was the title that cemented my love for the SNES.

Eight years later, I was fortunate enough to relive the experience through the eyes of my younger brother Dan, as we journeyed through my SNES collection. Watching him put the pieces together and forge his own path through the game elicited a great sense of pride, while also providing me with an even deeper appreciation of the game's timeless qualities. To this day, Dan is a huge fan of the Mega Man franchise, and that is due in no small part to the many hours we spent trading off levels playing *Mega Man X*. –Matt Miller

Scurfer Publishing, LTD

Mega Man X2

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.



Those pesky Maverick Reploids, who were supposedly contained in the previous game, have broken away from their control center and have been detected in an abandoned production factory. Only one Reploid in a special armada of mobilized Maverick Hunters was able to penetrate the heavy artillery surrounding the factory. The hero's name is Mega Man X, and his job is to destroy the leaders of this new uprising.

As Mega Man X, you are equipped with a firing mechanism that shoots right and left, and you can add numerous weapons (such as bubbles, slicers, and chains) to your arsenal as you run, jump on platforms, and otherwise progress through the game. You can also find secret capsules hidden by Dr. Light. These will enhance your abilities, giving you the power to jump higher, charge up weapons, and perform other helpful feats. At certain points in the game, you can hop into a Mobile Attack Cycle, which can fly, or a Mobile Attack Armor, which is equipped with a spin blade and enables you to become invincible

You begin the game in the abandoned Reploid factory. After shooting your way out, a stage select screen will appear, giving you the whereabouts of eight different Maverick leaders. After defeating all eight levels, you will be given another set of eight. You can only escape a level after you have beaten its boss, such as Bubble Crab, Magna Centipede, or Wheel Gator. You start with two lives and gain new ones by collecting Mega Man icons. You can also pick up heart tanks to increase the length of your health meter and tablets to recharge your health. Known in Japan as *Rockman X2*, *Mega Man X2* was ported to the GameCube and PlayStation 2 via the *Mega Man X Collection*.

Notable Quotable:

"When the Mega Man series made the jump from the 8-bit era to the 16-bit, the notoriously challenging side-scrolling series took on a new form. Embracing a darker story and expanding gameplay thanks to the capabilities of Nintendo's new hardware, Capcom's beloved blue robot took on a new identity . . . Previously, Mega Man titles focused on straightforward levels that could be accessed in any order. The Mega Man X games retained that free-form level selection, but Capcom fleshed out the level design to include alternate paths and hidden areas, thus encouraging exploration and multiple play-throughs. Mega Man X continued on as its own separate series alongside the core Mega Man franchise, and its sequel, *Mega Man X2*, took all the changes *Mega Man X* made and polished them with better weapons, bosses, and levels. While there are still debates happening in pockets of the internet over which of the Mega Man series is the better of the two, we can all agree that *Mega Man X2* is one of the SNES's best games." –Digital Trends (www.digitaltrends.com), which ranked *Mega Man X2* the 15th best SNES game.

Insider Insight:
I had high expectations going into *Mega Man X2*. The first *X* did everything right: excellent graphics, level design, and sound effects, along with a soundtrack I can still hum. There're even some hidden Easter eggs for the truly determined. (HADOUKEN!) While *X* reinvented the wheel compared to *Mega Man* 1-6 on the NES, *X2* doesn't break new ground. It reminds me of *Mega Man 4* in that respect: "You liked *Mega Man 3*? Okay, we'll recycle all of the assets and give you new bosses—you're welcome!"

To be fair, there is something new in *Mega Man X2*. Once you defeat two Mavericks, X-Hunters Agile and Violen come out of the shadows, and you're baited into fighting them to retrieve the parts of your destroyed comrade, Zero. (I don't want to go much further than that and spoil the plot.) Aside from the fact that it's a lot like *Mega Man X* (including the Dr. Light enhancement capsules and some Easter eggs), there are some positives. In Overdrive Ostrich's stage, you get to ride the light cycles (*Tron*!) seen in the intro cutscene, and you even hop a rocket to outer space.

In Wire Sponge's stage, you can actually affect the weather by attacking his crystals. Crystal Snail's stage brings back the mechs. The rising lava in Flame Stag's stage is panic-inducing, especially if you want the heart container! This is one game where I recommend looking up a FAQ and having a boss order going in. With *Mega Man X*, you could get away with doing things at random, but to avoid hours of frustration here, you need a master plan. The difficulty has been upped just enough to not let you take anything for granted, and some of the jumps are really precise. Make sure you have every item and upgrade before moving on to the final X-Hunters and Sigma. *Mega Man X2* isn't overly innovative, but it is the right combination of tough and fun. –Steve Juon

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Mega Man X3

PUBLISHER: Capcom.
DEVELOPER: Capcom.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1996.

A riot of Mavericks has broken out in the experimental utopia known as Doppler Town, spurring Mega Man X into action. For the first time in the series, Zero, Mega Man X's fellow Maverick hunter, is playable (outside of boss fights). Zero has two special attacks: hyper-zero blaster and 3-fold saber beam attack.

As you work your way through the game, running, dashing, clinging to and scaling walls, jumping on platforms, avoiding obstacles, and grabbing heart tanks and health sub-tanks, you must shoot enemy robots. As in previous games, you can only fire right and left. By entering armor capsules Dr. Light has hidden, you can enhance your abilities, such as seeing where hidden items are located, protective armor that reduces damage by fifty percent, boots that let you perform the air dash in three different directions, and double-charged X-buster blasts. In addition, there are four Robot Ride Armors you can find, including Chimera and Hawk, the latter of which lets you hover in the air.

As usual per the franchise, you must complete a series of eight selectable stages, each ending in a boss that will give over its weapon when you defeat it. Bosses, a.k.a. Mavericks, include: Blast Hornet (parasitic bomb), Blizzard Buffalo (frost shield), Gravity Beetle (gravity well), Toxic Seahorse (acid burst), Volt Catfish (triad thunder), Crush Crawfish (spinning blade), Tunnel Rhino (tornado fang), and Neon Tiger (ray splasher). Known in Japan as *Rockman X3*, *Mega Man X3* was ported to the GameCube and PlayStation 2 via the *Mega Man X Collection*. An enhanced version of *Mega Man X3* was released for the PlayStation and Saturn.

Insider Insight:
There's no rest in the year 21XX. Mega Man X and Zero learn that the formerly benevolent Dr. Doppler, who had helped suppress and reprogram the Reploid Mavericks, went rogue and unleashed those Mavericks on the world.

The plot of *Mega Man X3* drew me in immediately, and what could have been an unnecessary sequel was instead—pun intended—just what the doctor ordered. Some consider this to be the hardest installment of the original X trilogy, but with the added bonus of Zero being a playable character throughout. Unfortunately, you have to be really careful with him because "if you die in the game you die in real life," and Zero won't be available to you again, unless of course you hit reset and start over with a password from an earlier point.

Gameplay is hardly the most difficult part of this cartridge, though—actually acquiring a copy is the hardest part! A few years ago, my wife and I scoured local game shops for months until she found one in the box (game only, no inserts) for $50 and bought it immediately. It was already going for double that on eBay at that point and commands a far higher value now. As a result, most of you reading this who have played the game probably played it through either Nintendo's Virtual Console or the *Mega Man X Collection* (or, GASP!, emulation).

Is *Mega Man X3* worth $200 or more? I enjoy the game but not that much more than *X2*, which you can usually find for half the price on a cartridge. Plus, you can buy either one on Virtual Console for $8, and I honestly can't tell much difference.

The music is dreary on this one compared to *X* and *X2*, which may make you wonder what you spent so much money on. However, Neon Tiger's stage does have an infamously uncanny tune similar to a Guns N' Roses song! That's always worth a good laugh—just not for $200 or more. –Steve Juon

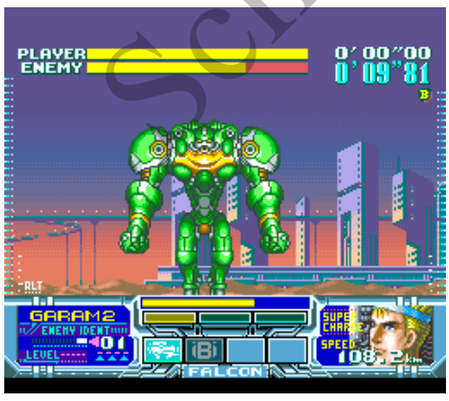
Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Metal Combat:
Falcon's Revenge

PUBLISHER: Nintendo.
DEVELOPER: Intelligent Systems.
GAME TYPE: Light Gun Shooter, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

The sequel to *Battle Clash*, *Metal Combat: Falcon's Revenge* features roughly the same type of first-person Super Scope action, in which players, as the gunner of one of several giant robots, blast away at exotic-looking giant robots (one at a time, as though they are all bosses), all the while intercepting enemy missiles and counterattacks. Players can fire standard shots and use special attacks. Weapons can be charged to unleash heavy blasts. The enemy robots, each of which has a weak spot for increased damage, fly around a lot and often move quickly, and the screen scrolls automatically, keeping the player on his or her toes.

Several additions and improvements to the formula established by *Battle Clash* have been made, including continues, battery backup, nicer graphics, an easier control system, new weapons (including a neutron beam), more varied enemies, a more fleshed-out storyline, and a player ranking system. Gamers can even play as a second character by the name of Tornado. Modes of play include Training, Time Trial, Battle, and Combat, the last of which lets a second gamer join in with a standard controller. Despite the post-apocalyptic storyline, the graphics are detailed and colorful, and some of the backgrounds feature psychedelic design. The music has range and some nice dramatic flourishes, but the voice effects are muffled.



Notable Quotable:

"When I first played this game my first impression was, 'Wow this game can speak to you.' But then I quickly realized it was actually the sequel to *Battle Clash*, and the amusement wore off rather quickly . . . This game actually includes a basic tutorial, and the difficulty spikes are more abrupt than in the first game (it goes from very easy to hard rather quickly). For the most part, *Metal Combat* received mixed reviews, but I say that it's equally as terrible as the first one. *MC: FR* did mix up the formula much better than the previous *BC*, and you can actually choose between two of the mech suits, which actually changes gameplay slightly. The graphics were slightly improved, and at least the protagonist looked a lot better than he did in the first game." –Retro Gaming Mag (retrogamingmagazine.com)

Notable Quotable:

"I first played *Metal Combat* in 1994, shortly after it was released in North America at the end of 1993. I would watch in awe as my brother fought through stage after stage with the Super Scope. When I got my hands on it, I found the gun controller to be very bulky and exceptionally hard to get used to. After I was able to adjust, I learned to love the game and played the hell out of it, probably more than my brother did . . . The joy of playing *Metal Combat* came from the battles. Each stage was a one-on-one fight with an enemy ST that you had to destroy. The cool thing is, they were fully destructible, and you could blow off their arms, legs, weapons, whatever. It was up to you to destroy your enemies in whatever way you wished, which was a very cool change of pace, because back in 1993, most gamers were used to just pointing their characters at the enemy and shooting it until it died . . . One aspect of *Metal Combat* that was loads of fun was the two- player mode . . . The coolest thing about it was the fact that the second player actually played as the boss characters . . . this was by far the best Super Scope game ever developed." –The Review Depot (vgrants.wordpress.com)

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Metal Marines

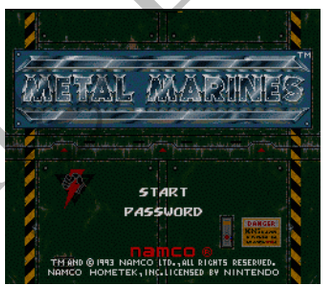
PUBLISHER: Namco Hometek.
DEVELOPER: Namco Limited.
GAME TYPE: Real-Time Strategy, 1 player.
YEAR: 1993.

Viewed from an isometric perspective, *Metal Marines* takes place in 2117, two years after the Antimatter War, which left Earth decimated and reduced continents to thousands of small islands. The planet is now under the control of Zorguef, a Federal military commander who has declared himself emperor. As the commander of the space colonies' allied forces, you must lead a military force, whose main unit is the Metal Marine mech—a piloted, armored robot with various abilities—against Zorguef and his minions.

There are twenty missions in all, comprised of building arsenals of high-tech weapons, destroying your opponent's forces with missile strikes, and guiding Metal Marines in ground-based combat, all to destroy enemy bases while protecting your own. You'll read briefings, place your underground bases, manage resources, upgrade existing facilities, and construct new buildings, including factories, energy plants, hangars, and economic centers. A key to victory is strategic placement of your units, including gun pods, land mines, missiles, and Metal Marines, which automatically fire at nearby targets or engage in melee attacks against closer enemies.

Notable Quotable:

"While the presentation is dated and the game rules can be obtuse and unclear, *Metal Marines* does provide a satisfying experience for those who like methodical attacks and tactical planning. Throughout the game's campaign, various poorly-scripted enemy commanders send threatening broadcasts to the player. Oddly, the over-the-top presentation of the villains brings to mind *Punch-Out!!* in their cartoony, one-note look and feel. Of course, the difference here is that players won't be facing these commanders head-on . . . Early attacks are important, as they gather intelligence about the enemy island, which the player can't see until an attack happens . . . Don't expect a colorful, explosive array of pixel art and sprites while playing *Metal Marines*; while the portraits of the villains are big, anime-style caricatures, the actual game features a lot of dull green, blue, brown, and gray. The music is rather repetitive and the audio is generic . . . Luckily, the gameplay is a lot of fun and makes up for the other shortcomings once you get used to it; It's satisfying to take down enemy structures and bases, and there's an upgrade system for making units stronger . . . The bland presentation and initially confusing gameplay date this one a bit . . . *Metal Marines* is a (charming) relic of the past." –Lee Meyer (www.nintendolife.com)



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Insider Insight:
In 1994, during a cold January weekend, my little brother Matt and I rented *Metal Marines* and were absolutely floored by how unusual the game was. The only thing that would have made it better was a two-player co-op option. Suddenly, we had an idea.

We both had our own TVs in our bedrooms as our dad was a giant A/V junkie. He had a plethora of equipment, including a video splitter that he used to copy VHS tapes. If this worked with two VHS players and a TV, we figured it would work with one SNES and two TVs. We grabbed a bunch of video and audio cables, along with some couplers, and hooked them up to both TVs. We flipped the SNES on and . . . success! We had invented a co-op version of *Metal Marines*.

While I concentrated on offense in my room, Matt managed the cost of resources in his. If there was something I needed to build in large quantities, Matt would calculate the needed resources and inform me when I could proceed to make them. Matt would also put together maps to use for setting up spots for missile strikes. For the next two hours, we shouted at each other from room to room with requests. Matt got an even better idea and came into my room holding two Radio Shack walkie-talkies: "Let's use these to coordinate with each other and save our voices!", he said with a laugh.

To add to the fun of the walkie-talkie chatter, Matt played the role of the deployed Metal Marines in battle, often letting out screams as I accidentally led a squad of marines to their doom. It definitely added to the tension of the game as much as it added a sense of accomplishment when we discovered an enemy base under a decoy.

We finished the game that weekend, and it was one of the most dynamic and fun co-op experiences I've ever had. We tried doing something similar with other games, but it just never quite added up to the fun we had with *Metal Marines*. Both of us remember it fondly. –Mike Mertes

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Metal Morph

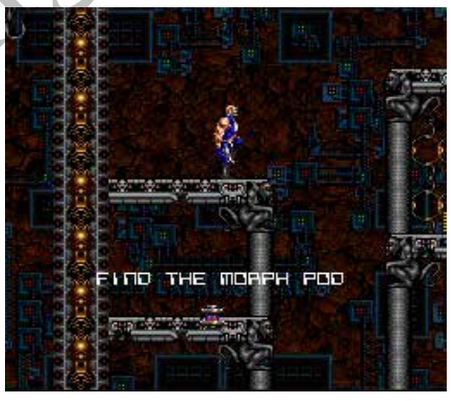
PUBLISHER: FCI.
DEVELOPER: Origin Systems.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter/Third-Person Space Shooter, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Taking place on six worlds—Lava Planet, Magmus Industrial Planet, Dannub Cavern Planet, Speleos Military Planet, Semperus Desert Planet, and Cridean—during the year 2214, *Metal Morph* features two types of gameplay. The most prominent features you, as an advanced test pilot named Metallion, walking, jumping on platforms, riding conveyor belts and moving platforms, activating switches (to turn off force fields and deactivate moving floors), and shooting alien life forms. You can also morph into liquid metal for traveling through tight spaces, and crouch down to grab such items as continues, energy, invulnerability, triple fire, and homing missiles. Morphing into liquid metal also enables you to move across certain platforms that can't support your weight while you are in human form.

During flying sequences, which comprise the rest of the game, you pilot the AIMS Intrepid, firing at enemy vessels, dodging incoming shots, and destroying energy pods to release shields, speed, continues, and smart bombs. Neither genre represented fares particularly well.

Notable Quotable:

"*Metal Morph*, in an effort to be 'cinematic' no doubt, welcomes us with an homage/spoof of the famous THX sound system, 'Deep Note,' and then cuts to the B-grade sci-fi plot . . . you use the morph as a scout, to find power-ups and switches, and then turn back into human form to kill everything, but in practice it doesn't work very well. For starters, the enemies overcompensate for our slimy invulnerability by leaving the human form almost no time of reaction, shooting as soon as they spot the player (sometimes even from off-screen), and since Metallion goes down in one hit, it gets frustrating quickly . . . Once [you are] on the egg-ship, the game turns into a rail shooter, but things don't get better. Shooting sequences—both in the void of space, with the next planet in the distance, and over said planet—sport two different control schemes, flying and arcade, but it doesn't matter much since they are primitive and almost unplayable either way." –Federico Tiraboschi (www.hardcoregaming101.net)



Scarfet Publishing

Metal Warriors

PUBLISHER: Konami.
DEVELOPER: LucasArts.
GAME TYPE: Platform Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

The year is 2102. An intergalactic army called the Dark Axis Forces is threatening to enslave Earth. To ward off this invasion, you can jump into six different battledroid armored suits. Each suit is equipped with offensive and defensive weapons, such as cannons, mines, rifles, a plasma gun, a beam sabre, a flame cannon, shields, and/or a chain whip. Some battledroids fly, some jump, some make bridges, one climbs onto walls and the roof, and one does a rolling attack. Power-ups to grab include rockets, reverse gravity boots, time bombs, heat seeking missiles, and more, and you can find items to restore your health. At any time, you can exit your 'droid, fly around, and search for and enter another battledroid suit.

You'll battle your way through nine missions (underground, inside an asteroid, subterranean mining facilities, bombed-out cities, and the like), breaking through walls and doors, avoiding mines, fireballs, and other obstacles, and shooting gun emplacements, robots, alien battledroids, and other enemies. Objectives include locating agent Marissa and exiting enemy base, seizing control of the enemy's ship, securing the enemy base inside an asteroid, protecting the mother ship, locating and destroying a massive ground defense cannon, and more. Between-level cinemas carry the story forward.

Metal Warriors is an excellent game similar to *Cybernator*, but it adds a two-player versus mode and the ability for you to exit your battledroid. Technically, it's not a sequel to *Cybernator*, but you could call it a spiritual successor. Released relatively late in the life of the SNES, this game is now very hard to find.

Fun Fact:
In episode twenty-six of *The Game Chasers*, the popular YouTube show, Billy finds a copy of the highly valuable *Metal Warriors* for just $5 at The Game Room Trading Post in Malvern, Arkansas. In short, he "caught 'em slippin.'" About the find, he says: "I'm a collector. I live for these moments. This is a game that I'm probably never gonna be able to find again just lying around."

Notable Quotable:
"A stellar shoot-'em-up . . . a wonderful game to play by yourself or with friends. The difficulty is a bit high, but nothing you can't handle. The music and graphics are first-rate, and the gameplay will not let you down. This is one of those games that often gets overlooked for flashier 16-bit action games like *Contra III*, but *Metal Warriors* is a must-own for any Super NES library." –Alexsander Angelo (www.defunctgames.com)

Insider Insight:
One of my favorite games from the SNES era is Konami's *Metal Warriors*. If you're like most people that I tell that to, you're probably thinking something along the lines of, "What game?"

While it's not all that well known, *Metal Warriors* is a gem-and-a-half. Why? Because it sits you in the cockpit of a big mech and gives you all the toys that you'd expect. It's no ship-based shooter, though—it's a side-scrolling action title. And it did some things that few other games were doing during the time, like allowing you to leave your mech at any point and go on foot. Not that that's advised, since you could easily be crushed by opposing mechs, or even have your own suit jacked!

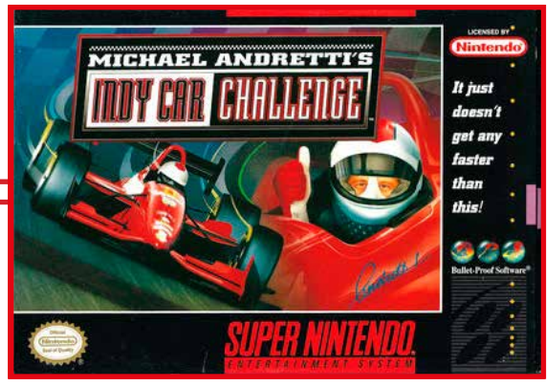
Metal Warriors also featured destructible environments, alternate weapons to outfit your robotic vehicle, and solid graphics and controls. It had a versus mode as well. The multi-play was so well-programmed that my friends and I regularly plugged it into our weekend gaming tournaments. It was nice having something to break up the otherwise standard barrage of fighting games.

The only bad part of the game was the lack of a save feature. Yep, another 16-bitter with the ugly splotch of savelessness. Honestly, though, I didn't really mind starting over from the beginning all that much—*Metal Warriors* was (and still is) that good. –Jason Micciche

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Michael Andretti's Indy Car Challenge

PUBLISHER: Bullet-Proof Software.
DEVELOPER: Genki.
GAME TYPE: Formula-1 / Indy Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



Endorsed by the son of racing legend Mario Andretti (Michael is no slouch, either), this game puts you low to the track, viewing the action from behind your car. There are sixteen twisting, turning tracks to race on: Australia, Phoenix, Long Beach, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Detroit, Portland, Cleveland, Toronto, Michigan, Ohio, New Hampshire, Vancouver, Elkhart Lake, Nazareth, and Monterey, each augmented by Mode 7 graphics. Prior to each race, you can adjust tire pressure, down force, and gear ratio. The game is loosely based on the 1994 CART World Series season, and Michael Andretti himself offers advice. Modes of play include Practice, Championship (a sixteen-race season), and Versus, the last of which offers two-player split-screen action. There are two difficulty levels—normal and pro—and you must occasionally enter the pit stop to have the crew change your car's tires and fill its gas tank.

Notable Quotable:

"Despite Michael Andretti's success in the world of Indy cars, racing fans find nothing in his *Indy Car Challenge* that hasn't been done before. The lack of variety, especially in the backgrounds, from one track to another leads to very monotonous driving once you've taken a few checkered flags." –*Game Players* (February 1995)

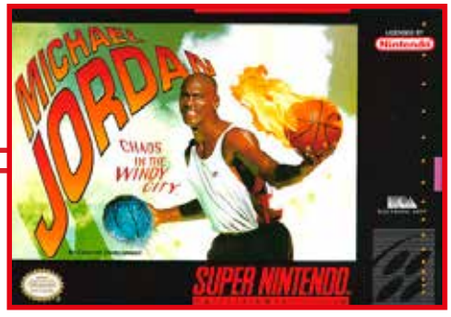
Fun Fact:

Michael Andretti is married to model and actress Jodi Ann Paterson, a former Miss Oregon Teen USA. She was also *Playboy*'s Playmate of the Month for October 1999, and was named Playmate of the Year in 2000, thus proving that racecar drivers have more fun.

Stiffer Publishing LTD

Michael Jordan:
Chaos in the Windy City

PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts.
DEVELOPER: Electronic Arts.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.



Arguably the greatest basketball player in NBA history gets a side-scrolling platformer with *Michael Jordan: Chaos in the Windy City*. Run, jump, flip, ride (elevators), glide (on pulleys), and slam-dunk your way through more than twenty levels as you guide Air Jordan through four Chicago locations: The Cells, The Factory, The Laboratory, and Riverview. You must rescue Jordan's teammates, who have been kidnapped by Dr. Max Cranium. Each time Michael makes contact with an enemy, he loses energy. Pick up MJ Hearts, Wheaties Boxes, or Gatorade Bottles (product placement, much?) to increase energy, and grab Golden Hearts to add another globe to the health meter. You should also grab basketball coins, one hundred of which grant an extra life. Other helpful items include high-tops for invincibility, Golden 23s for extra lives, and color-coded keys for opening doors to power-ups and captive teammates. Warp doors take you to a bonus level where you can score points, power-ups, and items by shooting baskets.

Throughout the game, Michael is supplied with an unlimited number of basketballs for throwing at enemies, including bats, spiders, eyeballs, zombies, slime, and giant bosses made of basketballs. He can also use basketballs for flipping switches, activating platforms, and performing slam-dunks. When you dunk the ball, you'll score items, access a save point, or freeze or damage enemies. In addition to standard basketballs, there are seven different types of power balls, including a White Knuckleball, which goes through solid walls, a Flame Ball, which is twice as powerful as the normal basketballs, and a Smoking Earthquake ball, which damages all enemies in view. Since licensing issues kept MJ from appearing in such contemporary hoops titles as *NBA Jam*, fans had to settle for this platformer.

Notable Quotable:
"I got really into *Chaos in the Windy City*. If you like Jordan, or you're really into platform games, you're going to have to give this a try. You might be just as surprised as I was." *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (January 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"This was not the game to showcase the legend's athletic prowess, but more the perfect example of what the gaming industry is left with when you combine the world's largest sports star, a healthy wad of advertising cash, and EA—presumably—consuming an unprecedented quantity of illegal substances . . . Gameplay aims to master the art of tedium, and for the most part succeeds with dazzlingly flying colors. While the basic structure is broken down to 'get from point A to point B' amongst freeing your helpless teammates, the environments never manage to inch past depressingly dull; moving from prison to train to factory to train to . . . another train? In an attempt to help break the monotony, as well as provide some light entertainment for the zombies, the occasional basketball hoop is sporadically sprinkled in to help remind everyone that MJ is a basketball star after all . . . It's a pity that the poorly implemented mechanic just becomes another annoyance as you struggle to hit that sweet spot and actually nail the move while dodging enemy attacks." –Adam Guetti (www.ign.com)

Insider Insight:
When I first began collecting retro video games a few years ago, I watched various YouTubers to check out games I had never played or even seen before. A group called "Continue?" played *Michael Jordan: Chaos in the Windy City*, and I was blown away by how hilarious and fun it looked—I knew I had to have it for my collection.

I only paid eight dollars for the game, and it was well worth it as a goofy and zany ride. Although I've never finished the game, it holds a special place in my heart for being a crazy-strange game that broke the mold. It hearkens back to an era when I was a child and just about any idea would become a video game. It is sad that the industry has lost its way and just seems to copy itself each year. Games like *Call of Duty*, *Battlefield*, and *Assassin's Creed* flood the market, and there is very little originality among the major publishers.

Games like *Michael Jordan's Chaos in the Windy City* are the reason why I busted out the old SNES and started a small collection. It's a blast discovering new (to me) titles and reliving a time when the video game industry had more creativity. –Raymond Fix

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Mickey Mania: *The Timeless Adventures of Mickey Mouse*

PUBLISHER: Sony Imagesoft.
DEVELOPER: Traveller's Tales.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Released the same year as such remarkable platformers as *Donkey Kong Country*, *The Lion King*, and *Earthworm Jim*, *Mickey Mania* holds its own by letting players guide Disney's famous mouse through six levels, each based on an historical Mickey Mouse animated film: *Steamboat Willie* (1928, in glorious black-and-white), *The Mad Doctor* (1933), *Moose Hunters* (1937), *The Lonesome Ghosts* (1937), *Mickey and the Beanstalk* (1947), and *The Prince and the Pauper* (1990). The controls are simple, but gameplay is challenging, thanks in part to light puzzle elements, along with such obstacles as wrecking balls, collapsing bridges, exploding skeletons, bubbling liquid, rolling barrels, and falling tree branches. In addition to dodging obstacles, Mickey runs, jumps, ducks, climbs stairs (during a sequence that evokes *Tower Toppler*), swings on ropes, rides a gurney and a raft, runs away from a moose (toward the screen, providing an interesting viewpoint), and negotiates moving platforms. He also throws marbles at such enemies as bats, ghosts, spiders, parrots, beetles, dragonflies, and Pete, his arch-nemesis.

Cartoonlike, musical, and variety-filled, *Mickey Mania* is an entertaining and beautiful adventure with incredible animation (Disney animators helped bring the game to life). However, the Genesis version is better as it has superior controls (less floaty), smoother animation, and faster gameplay. Plus, the SNES game has long load times and is missing the hidden Band Concert stage (accessible from *Mickey and the Beanstalk* in other versions) and the staircase sequence in *The Mad Doctor* level, as well as some animations and Pluto appearances. The Sega CD version has more voice effects and a special level in which "all the Mickeys from the six animated features join modern Mickey in a final battle to defeat arch-nemesis, Pete." Released on the PlayStation in Europe and Australia as *Mickey's Wild Adventure*.

Notable Quotable:

"Although *Mickey Mania*'s pure platform-rooted gameplay doesn't result in an original play experience, its sedate pace, lack of replay value, and stiff challenge are balanced out by exciting set-pieces. The nostalgic history lesson through classic Mickey cartoons is a great setting, plus the visuals and audio carry all six level's themes off with aplomb. The game was so well-crafted that Sony deemed it good enough to be converted to PS1 two years later without massive alterations as *Mickey's Wild Adventure*, a strong indication of this 16-bit gem's quality." –Jamie O'Neill (www.nintendolife.com)

Insider Insight:
I was always a cartoon history geek, so *Mickey Mania*'s release on the SNES was one game I had to play. My copy came from my local video store, which was getting rid of its SNES games to make room for the then-new N64 and PS1 consoles. Even though it turns out that it was the lesser of the four versions released, I still enjoyed the graphics and the references to classic Mickey cartoons. One side effect of playing the game is that it always makes me feel like watching the source material! Thank goodness for my *Disney Treasures* DVD! –Sarah Szefer

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Mickey's Ultimate Challenge

PUBLISHER: Hi Tech Expressions.
DEVELOPER: Designer Software.
GAME TYPE: Adventure Puzzle, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

Mickey's Ultimate Challenge consists of five agreeable (if shallow) puzzle levels. You can play as Mickey or Minnie and select from three difficulty levels: cake, medium, or challenging. In Horace's Library, books move up and down like platforms, and you must jump on the books marked with letters to spell out a word. Daisy's Art Gallery has you riding and climbing up and down a ladder, using a feather duster to clean paintings to uncover matching pairs. To lower Huey, Dewey, and Louie's Drawbridge (a *Simon*-influenced memory game), you must jump on several pumps in the correct sequence that they lit up (this continues for a while, adding a step each time). In Goofy's Blacksmith Shop, you use a hammer to pound out answers as he guesses what tools (and in what order) are in Goofy's tool box. Finally, Donald's Wizard Tower is a top-down maze puzzler in which a shrunken Mickey or Minnie pushes potions around a chess board and into a magic mirror. After completing all five challenges, you will climb a beanstalk and solve a sliding picture puzzle of an alarm clock. This cute, cartoonish, all-ages title was also released for the Game Boy, Game Gear, and Genesis. The Master System version (1998), which was the last official game for the console, wasn't released in the U.S.

Notable Quotable:

"Each of the five problems in *Mickey's Ultimate Challenge* is unique, requiring a different skill to solve. The game's greatly enhanced by its three difficult levels: cake for kids in grades K-3, medium for grades 4–9, and challenging for older players. And take it from me, the difference from one skill level to the next makes *Mickey's Ultimate Challenge* as tough for adults as it is for children." –*Game Players* (August 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"While the visuals don't aspire to be the best on the console, the scenery is effective in its own simplicity, and Mickey and Minnie's animations are fluid in motion. I liked that it took place in a universe shared with Mickey and the Pauper, and some puzzles are decent, ranging from the game's own versions of *Mastermind* to *Simon* to even *Sōkoban*, among others. And while those puzzles aren't bad, the last one really kills the whole game for me: block sliding. It's not such an issue on cake mode, but on the medium and challenging modes it is way too complex and takes a long time to figure out . . . It is not a bad game, and it's fun for a few short bursts, but it is one of Mickey's weakest titles." –StarBlog (starboy91.blogspot.com)

Insider Insight:

Just recently I was at my friend's house, making burgers and talking obscure video games. He brought out a game he had just acquired. I figured it was one of the many Mickey Mouse games I had played before, but I didn't recognize the cover. We plugged it into the Super Nintendo and tried it out. My buddy said that he really didn't know how to get anywhere in the game, so we randomly jumped around until we found a way to get around the castle.

Much to our surprise, we beat *Mickey's Ultimate Challenge* in about twenty minutes. Not believing the shortness of it, we tried it on the "challenging" option and beat it just as quickly—hardly an "ultimate challenge." We were shocked, but it was the perfect amount of time for the burgers to cook, so, in all honesty, I like the game for what it is. What it does, it does well, and in a very small timeframe. If I had kids, I imagine they would love it. –Keith Haus

Schiffer Publishing LTD

Micro Machines

PUBLISHER: Ocean Software.
DEVELOPER: Merit Studios Europe.
GAME TYPE: Miniature/Radio Control Racing, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Viewed from overhead, *Micro Machines* is a charming take on the *Super Sprint* formula. Players select from eight different vehicles, including sports cars, helicopters, power boats, 4x4s, and shell-firing combat tanks, and eight different racing environments, including a living room floor, a flower garden, a pool table, and a bathtub. There are twenty-eight tracks in all, as opposed to thirty-two in the Genesis and NES versions.

One-player races are against three computer-controlled cars while two-player games feature head-to-head action. There are eleven characters to compete against, each with his or her own skill level. At the top/left of the screen, you'll see eight colored lights representing the points won by each player. When one of the Micro Machines gets an entire screen length ahead, that player wins a bonus point, and one of the loser's lights changes to the winner's color. When one player has all eight lights displaying their color, he or she wins the race.

The controls are simple, the racing action is fun, and the game makes creative use of cereal, a rubber ducky, a toy shovel, books, and other commonplace items. Unlike the NES and Genesis versions, the SNES game offers three- and four-player simultaneous action via multi-tap adapter compatibility. Based on the line of Galoob toys. Also released for the Game Boy and Game Gear. Followed by numerous sequels, including *Micro Machines 64 Turbo* (Nintendo 64) and *Micro Machines 1 and 2: Twin Turbo* (Game Boy Color). Unlicensed.

Fun Fact:
Introduced by Galoob in 1987, Micro Machines were made of plastic and, as the name suggests, were the smallest toy cars on the market. Early TV commercials featured actor John Moschitta Jr., who at the time was listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the world's fastest talker.

Notable Quotable:
"Simple, innocent fun . . . The crisp, colorful graphics are functional, but appear a bit sparse at times. *Micro Machines* doesn't make an effort to be 3D, but there are a lot of 'bumps' that make your car appear to 'hop' thanks to some clever shadowing effects. Except for the tanks, there are no weapons or power-ups, but that simplicity is actually refreshing in a way. There's a single-player Challenge mode, and while it certainly is a challenge, there's no score to gauge your performance, which limits its replay value. To get the most out of *Micro Machines* you need to hook up the multi-tap for some four-player head-to-head action. Players who know the tracks have a marked advantage, however, since you can't see too far ahead, and it's hard to react to turns when you don't know they're coming. Overall, *Micro Machines* for the SNES is a solid but unspectacular arcade-style racer." –The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:
While growing up, I was always looking for ways to connect with my older brother. Being eleven years apart, this was not always the easiest task, but it occasionally happened through toys or a game. Micro Machines were popular before I was old enough to really get into them, but my brother had a collection of the little figures that we would have fun with from time to time.

When I discovered the *Micro Machines* SNES game at our local video store, renting it was a no-brainer. From the first time we played it together, my brother and I were hooked. I rented the game week after week from the shop down the street until I finally convinced the owner to outright sell me the copy, which I still have in my collection to this day.

This top-down racer is not for the faint of heart. It has a great single-player campaign where you eliminate the competitors one by one, but the player-versus-player modes are where the game really excels and friendships are lost. The graphics are simple but appealing, while the course design is thoughtful and amazing. You can slide around corners, push opponents off of tables, shoot them from your tank, and even drive right into the pockets of a billiard table.

The only potentially negative thing I can say about this game is that there is no music while you're racing. However, this isn't a big loss as it heightens the suspense and lets you focus on the screen while you try to stay one step ahead of your opponent. *Micro Machines* is one of my favorite racing titles on the SNES, and I collect it for every system. I collect the sequels as well. –Anthony J. La Gambina

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Might and Magic III:
Isles of Terra

PUBLISHER: FCI.
DEVELOPER: Iguana Entertainment.
GAME TYPE: First-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
YEAR: 1995.

The follow-up to *Might and Magic: Gates to Another World* for the Genesis and to *Might and Magic II: Gates to Another World* for the PC, *Isles of Terra* has you leading a party of adventurers to a rendezvous with the legendary wizard Corak, and to defeat Sheltem, who plans to destroy the world. You'll explore towns, castles, caverns, dungeons, tombs, pyramids, and other locales, using swords, axes, and other melee-style weapons to battle monsters. You travel on a grid, looking and moving in all four primary directions; when enemies approach, you engage in turn-based combat.

You begin the game with a set of six pre-made characters, each with different statistics related to might, intelligence, personality, endurance, speed, accuracy, and luck. You can also create your own characters and hire adventurers, and your characters can learn skills as they go, such as cartography, danger sense, detect secret passages, mountaineering, pathfinding, and swimming. There are ten character classes: Knights, Paladins, Archers, Ninjas, Rangers, Sorcerers, Druids, Rangers, Clerics, and Barbarians. Clerics, Sorcerers, and Druids can cast numerous spells, including light (for lighting torches), energy blast (bolt of flame, electricity, ice, or acid), sleep (for hypnotizing monsters), levitate, dancing sword, first aid, create food, raise dead, and/or power shield, to name just a few.

Much of the action has you selecting from a menu of options, including shoot, cast (spells), rest (restore hit points and spell points), bash (break down a locked door or crash through a wall), map, information (display time, date, year, day of the week, and which spells the party has active), and quick reference (display list of party's vital statistics, gold, gems and food). Combat menu selections include quick fight (directs your character to the first monster on the list), attack, use (item), run, and block, among others. The game is compatible with the SNES Mouse, but the original computer version was faster in terms of combat, navigating the menus, and maneuvering through the vast areas. Also released for the TurboGrafx-16 CD.

Notable Quotable:

"This is a decent RPG with some good features, like a solid storyline and excellent music, but the interface is poor. Although the scrolling is true to PC, the step-by-step frame can get you after a while." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"Released for PC in 1991, *Isles of Terra* was revolutionary due to its graphics, sound, simplified control, more complex world, and beginner-friendly difficulty level . . . Unfortunately, the SNES version suffers from Nintendo's rough restrictions at that time . . . In the uncensored version [PC], the damage of the enemies was displayed via a bit of blood splatter. In the censored version [SNES], the blood has been replaced by a red 'X' . . . Savages and goblins lose their blood-smeared weapons, and zombies aren't rotted anymore . . . The salesperson's line has been altered. He mentions 'finest killing devices' in the PC version but 'finest weapons' in the SNES version . . . Furthermore, this transfer is a technical disaster . . . The graphics of the environment have been downscaled . . . The sound is pitiful, and the music of the original has been replaced by new, monotone music. It's quite a surprise that the SNES hardware was handled so badly. Even the Mega Drive version, which also suffers from slow pace, looks and sounds better." –Movie-Censorship.com (www.movie-censorship.com)

Schiffer Publishing,

Insider Insight:
I'm a huge fan of *Might and Magic: Gates to Another World* on the Genesis. I played it through to the very end, so I was of course very excited to learn that the sequel was going to be released on the Genesis. Imagine, then, my disappointment when I learned it had been canceled. But wait! There was still a Sega CD version. Thoughts of a massive quest, smooth scrolling, and CD-quality audio and cutscenes constantly raced through my head at the time. Then it was announced that it wasn't going to be released in the U.S. The thought of the TurboGrafx-16 CD-ROM version briefly crossed my mind, and then I remembered I didn't own the CD attachment. That was strike three. It seemed like *Might and Magic III: Isles of Terra* was trying to hide from me, and I half expected a Neo Geo port to arrive just to complete my trifecta of disappointment.

I waited seemingly forever for a chance to explore *Terra*. By 1995, my only recourse was the SNES port. As it turns out, that wasn't a bad way to go. It was accessible, and it was in English! Unfortunately, I was never able to play through it, since I had to rely on a rental version. The time I did spend with *Might and Magic III* was quite fun, though it was a bit jarring to once again go from the typical Japanese RPG to a Western one. The interface was clunkier than in the previous version, but at least I could play it. In the days before emulation and yummy raspberry pies, sometimes one ended up going the least-expected route just to play a particular game. I never thought I would get my *Might and Magic* fix, but I did, and I have the SNES to thank for it. Someday, I'll snag a copy and finally give *Terra* its just due, and playing with the SNES Mouse will make things much easier.

It may get lost in a sea of Square and *EarthBound* love, but *Might and Magic III* will always be a fond SNES memory for me. For someone who grew up on the Sega side of the console wars, I found the game to be a singular experience that I could not find on my Genesis. *Isles of Terra*, in a sense, provided me with a real-word equivalent of the reason why I played it in the first place: to explore. It served as a prime example of how not all the good games are on a single console, and finding them takes a bit of exploration on one's part. In this case, I'm glad I took up the quest. –Ken Horowitz

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Mighty Morphin Power Rangers

PUBLISHER: Bandai.
DEVELOPER: Bandai.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat/Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Based on Saban's low-budget television series, *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* finds Rita Repulsa up to her old tricks, using her nasty friends to try and pulverize the Power Rangers once and for all. To thwart this threat, the game lets you go into battle as one of five different Power Rangers: Billy (Blue Ranger), Trini (Yellow), Jason (Red), Kimberly (Pink), or Zack (Black). The game begins with the theme song from the TV show, including vocals.

In levels 1 through 5, you begin in teenager mode (wearing normal street clothes), where you can punch, throw, jump, kick, and duck. When you get close to a Putty creature, you should keep attacking while standing still to activate your special attack move. If you make it through the end of a section, your Ranger will morph into their Power Ranger costume for a second section of fiercer combat against the Putties, where you'll have more moves, including wall jump, dinobombs, hacking and slashing, and the ability to grab and hang on objects overhead. After the second section, you will advance to the boss level to battle one of Repulsa's henchmen. In levels 6 and 7, you fight one-on-one as a Megazord.

Unlike the much different Genesis game of the same name, which is a pure, non-scrolling fighting title patterned after *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter II*, *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* for the SNES incorporates such platforming mechanics as climbing obstacles, crawling through caverns, riding elevators, avoiding traps and projectiles, and swimming underground. You can also break open crates to increase your power. Interestingly, however, you can enter a password code (1515) in the SNES game that unlocks a two-player fighting mode.

Insider Insight:
I must admit that I was a little too old to care when the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* show aired on TV in the summer of 1993. However, I remember watching it with my younger cousins when they came to visit, and they would stand and shout the names of the Zords they imagined they commanded as they pretend to fight whatever monster was attacking in that day's episode. I would roll my eyes at their playful banter and continue playing my Game Boy while babysitting.

At the time, my family often went to the rental stores on Friday, and each of us would be allowed to rent a game for the weekend. There were a few weekends when we couldn't get to the store fast enough to get a good game. I would stand there trying to choose the best from what was left on the shelves. This is the moment where the back of the boxes became your best friend. All the info you would hopefully need would be presented to you right there on the cover. I remember seeing the box for *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* and letting an odd curiosity wash over me. The show was for kids, but could the game actually be any good?

I knew I was going to get ridiculed by my brothers and sisters for my choice, but I liked the look of the game. Beat-'em-ups are a hard genre to mess up, and this game did not disappoint. While not the most complex of the genre, it was still a blast to play. With a smile on my face, I enjoyed my weekend listening to the theme that I had rolled my eyes at so many times before. Go Go Power Rangers! –Zoe K. Howard

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Mighty Morphin Power Rangers:
The Fighting Edition

Publisher: Bandai.
Developer: Natsume.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

Like *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* for the Genesis, *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers: The Fighting Edition* is a one-on-one brawler. However, instead of selecting from color-coded Rangers, gamers play as a Power Rangers Zord: Thunder Megazord, Ninja Megazord, Shogun Megazord, or Mega Tigerzord; or as a villain: Lipsyncher, Goldar, Lord Zedd, Silver Horns, or Ivan Ooze, the latter of whom is unlockable in VS. Mode by holding down X + Y and pushing start. Each character can punch (weak and strong), crouch, throw, dash forward, and retreat back, in addition to using such weapons as projectiles or a sword.

Plus, each character has several *Street Fighter II*-style special moves, such as Thunder Megazord's lunge, thunder saber combo, and dive kick, and Lipsyncher's spinning kick, music strike, and heel dive. Each fighter also has one super move, such as Ninja Megazord's ninja clones and Lord Zedd's fingertip spears. If you execute your super move while the power bar is flashing, it will be extra powerful. There are three modes of play: Story (one-player only, play as Thunder Megazord or the Mega Tigerzord), Fighting (battle against the computer or another player, or watch two CPU controlled characters fight), and Trial (one-player only), in which you try to win as many battles as possible using only one health bar (that partially restores after each battle). Based on Saban's low-budget television series.

Notable Quotable:

"Sadly, *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers: The Fighting Edition* got pretty much zero fanfare in the pages of *EGM* and *GameFan* . . . Only in the years to come following its original release did word of mouth pick up and people recognized it as a legitimately good fighting game. Natsume could easily have phoned it in. Instead, they crafted a beautiful game with a rocking soundtrack and some remarkably refined gameplay . . . Sure, it could have used a bigger fighting roster, and I didn't like that four fighters shared the same background, but this game is not only surprisingly competent—it's a blast . . . The screen often shakes with explosions followed by a dazzling array of yellows, oranges, and reds as giant swords clang and massive columns of energy beams come raining down from the sky. The action suits the monster mayhem well, never failing to bring out the ten-year-old Power Rangers loving kid in me." –RVG Fanatic (rvgfanatic.com)

Insider Insight:

I love the Megazords. About the only thing as cool as giant robots fighting giant monsters are giant robots that combine into BIGGER robots to fight giant monsters, something the Power Rangers had in spades. Some of my favorite Christmas presents were Power Rangers Zords that I would spend hours combining together, and then taking apart, only to put them into new configurations.

When it came to games like *Aladdin* and *Jurassic Park*, I was always jealous of Genesis owners because the versions of those games always looked so much better in commercials than their SNES counterparts. In the case of *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, however, I gladly took the platform action game over the fighting game Genesis owners got, especially seeing as SNES owners got *Mighty Morphing Power Rangers:The Fighting Edition*, an exclusive fighting game strictly about Megazord battles.

Although it wasn't great, *The Fighting Edition* was good for a few rentals, and it's exactly what you think it is: A "me too" *Street Fighter II* clone replacing the World Warriors with Power Rangers robots and over-the-top monsters (similar to Konami's attempt at the same thing with the *TMNT* license).

I played the game briefly with my brother and my friends, the way any fighter should be played, but mostly I played the single-player Fighting mode, where you selected which Megazord you wanted to use. Each brief campaign started with a mini-movie of the Zords coming together with the classic *MMPR* music playing in the background; this was easily my favorite part of an average game. –Blair Farrell

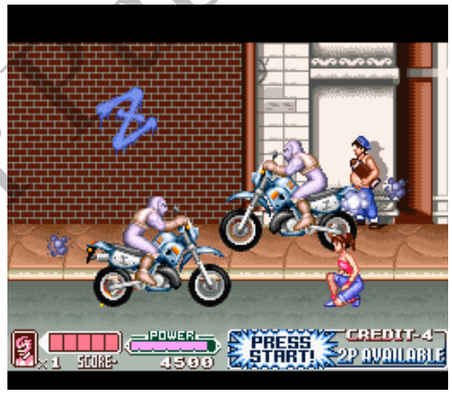
Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Mighty Morphin Power Rangers: *The Movie*

PUBLISHER: Bandai.
DEVELOPER: Natsume.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Ivan Ooze, aided by Lord Zedd's mean monsters, is trying to take over the world, and you must stop him in *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers: The Movie*, which was released the same year as the film of the same name. The game offers a selection of six different color-coded Power Rangers to control, each equipped with a weapon: Billy (Blue Ranger, lance), Aisha (Yellow, daggers), Rocky (Red, sword), Kimberly (Pink, bow), Adam (Black, axe), or Tommy (White, Saba). Each character can run, jump, punch, kick, climb, ski, and surf, and each can pull off a civilian special attack, such as a flying air kick or a super energy wall, and a ranger special attack, such as a rushing water flood or a giant boulder drop.

Levels to battle through include A City in Terror, Trouble at the Base, Putties on the Slopes, A Locomotive Disaster, Infiltrating The Enemies Headquarters, Inside The Headquarters, and The Final Confrontation, each populated with enemy putties. Levels contain bosses as well (one small and one large per stage), such as Cannon Top, who shoots missiles and fireballs, Skelerena, who breathes fire, or Magnet Brain, who stabs you and shoots out cyclones with his staff. Rangers begin each level in civilian gear, but collecting power-ups from defeated enemies fills a power bar that, when full, enables you to transform into your ranger outfit, which makes you more resilient to damage and your attacks more powerful. Filling the bar a second time enables usage of special weapons and attacks. Surprisingly, unlike its Genesis counterpart, the SNES game lacks voice effects and does not follow the plot of the film.



Insider Insight:
The Power Rangers phenomenon hit at just the right time as I was old enough to get wrapped up in the characters and lore, the cheesy monster costumes, and the awesome Megazords, but not too old enough to be embarrassed about it. Luckily, before my attention turned towards girls and alternative rock bands, I got to be excited for the first live-action Power Rangers movie and its tie-in video game.

If anyone had cared to do so at the time, they probably could have sued Bandai for false advertising over *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers:The Movie*. The title sells it as a movie game, but the only character featured on the cover is the White Ranger in his TV show costume, not the updated one from the film. This is in contrast to the Genesis version of the game which has a cover that is more in line with the film's marketing. Booting up the game reveals a sub-title "feat. Ivan Ooze." Even as a kid I thought this was odd. Isn't Ivan Ooze the main *bad* guy of the movie?!

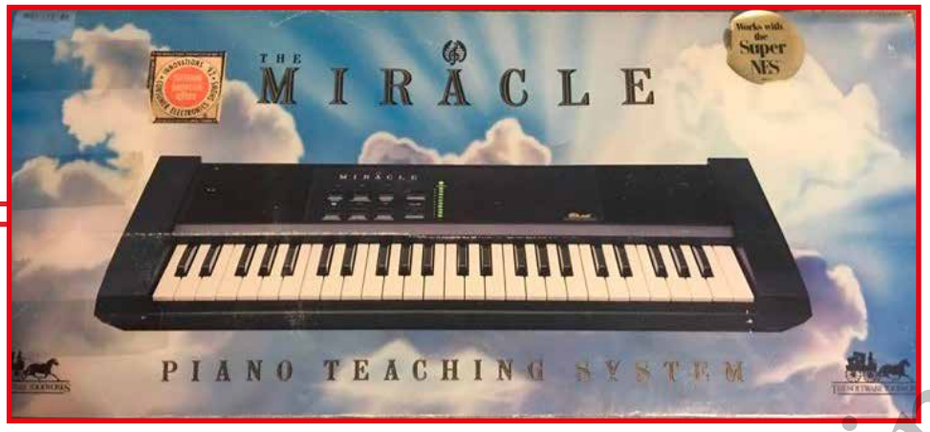
It didn't take me long to realize that *Mighty Morphin Powers Rangers: The Movie* was less a movie-related product and more a sequel to the first game released on SNES. However, I wasn't upset about it, because instead of being chained to the events of the film, I got to fight Putties and more of the ridiculous characters from the TV show.

Mighty Morphin Power Rangers:The Movie was significantly more challenging than the first *Rangers* game for the SNES, and I liked that I could play it with my brother co-operatively. One setback is that the most you get to see of a Megazord is when it pulls you out of a building in the final stage.–Blair Farrell

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

The Miracle Piano Teaching System

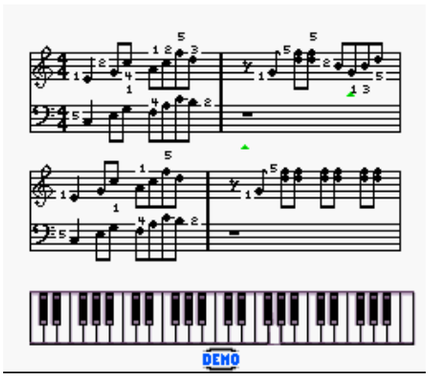
PUBLISHER: The Software Toolworks.
DEVELOPER: The Software Toolworks.
GAME TYPE: Musical Instrument/ Band Simulator, 1 player.
YEAR: 1991.



Packaged with a full-sized, forty-nine-key, electronic keyboard, which is enhanced with two speakers for stereo sound, *Miracle Piano Teaching System* teaches gamers and prospective musicians how to tickle the ivories like a pro (at least in theory). As you pound away at the pressure sensitive piano keys, onscreen keys flash to mimic the movements of the real keys. A variety of drills, musical numbers, and games (such as shooting ducks, landing paratroopers on targets, and creating a bridge for a robot) enable you to practice music notation, fingering techniques, pedaling, and more. In addition, the keyboard is equipped with more than one hundred virtual musical instruments and other sounds, including guitars, drums, a harpsichord, organ, vibraphone, and voice effects. There are different genres of music as well, such as rock, jazz, blues, rap, Latin, country, cathedral, and new age. To enhance the experience, you could order (from an enclosed form) a keyboard stand, a padded bench, and a protective carrying case. The SNES *Miracle Piano*, which originally retailed for around $500, is harder to find than its NES counterpart. It features forty-five built-in songs, as opposed to forty for the NES. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

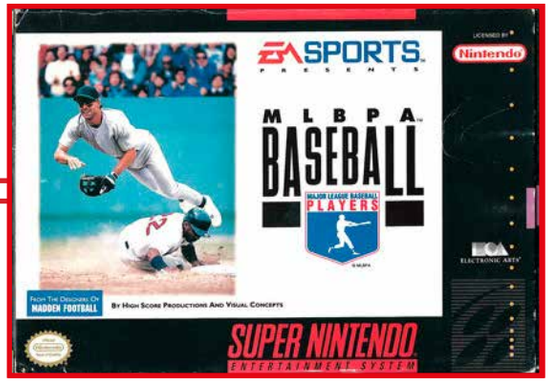
"It's pretty advanced . . . Depending on how hard you hit the keys, it reflects the noise, how loud it is. It also has the ability to split the sound so you can make half the keyboard one type of sound and the other half of the keyboard will be another type of sound . . . pretty cool, pretty sophisticated." –Gamester81 (YouTube)



Schiffer Publishing, LTD

MLBPA Baseball

PUBLISHER: EA Sports.
DEVELOPER: High Score Productions/Visual Concepts.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



A solid, arcade-style baseball game, *MLBPA Baseball*, as the title indicates, was licensed by the Major League Baseball Players Association, meaning virtually all of the real-life big leaguers of the time are featured. The lack of MLB licensing means real team names and logos aren't used, but the players, which are large, wear their respective colors and play for their respective cities. There are twenty-eight teams in all, and player statistics and ratings are based on the 1993 season.

Highlighted by a 162-game Season mode, the game is replete with features that hardball fans will appreciate, including rundowns, bad hops, booted balls, the double switch, cutoff plays, snap throws, authentic stadium music, and scoreboard animations. The batting view is from behind the plate. When the ball gets hit, the view switches to a 3/4 overhead perspective. The controls are simple and intuitive, and players can steer pitches. Passwords save progress; the Genesis version features battery backup. Known in Japan as *Fighting Baseball*.

Notable Quotable:

"Batting is fairly straightforward. If you crowd the batter's box, you'll probably hit a foul . . . if you back away from the box, you'll probably miss if you swing . . . Base running is automatic, until you reach first base. Then you have to manually move your runner(s), and it gets tricky if you have more than one. Stealing is pretty easy to master, but only the fastest runners seem to steal with any consistency . . . All runners who are theoretically forced to run (i.e. runners at first, or first and second, etc.) will go ahead and run, even on a fly ball. You have to make them go back, or else they tend to get thrown out . . . Sometimes the SNES makes its runners run on fly balls, but forgets to send them back . . . If you give an SNES batter the same pitch twice in a row, he'll usually hit it pretty hard . . . I've found that the only way I can avoid getting creamed is to let the SNES do the fielding . . . It's just too hard to have the right fielders in the right place at the right time." –Thomas Miller (*Game Bytes Magazine* #19, 1994)

Insider Insight:

To me, playing *MLBPA Baseball* was like cheating on a longtime girlfriend. When the game was released, I was just eleven years old, and I was a diehard Sega Genesis guy. The Super Nintendo was for losers. For those kids with glasses that played RPGs. I wanted to play *ToeJam & Earl*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, and *Altered Beast*. But after my brother decided to put mustard in the cartridge slot of the Genesis, an act he still won't admit he committed to this day, the family got an SNES. Seeing my family play *Super Mario World* was like treason. I was pissed.

I didn't want to touch the SNES at first. I wanted my Sega back, but my family had moved on. Renting *MLBPA Baseball* a few weeks after getting the system proved to me that, while it wasn't as good as *Sports Talk Baseball* on the Genesis, the SNES was no joke. I had been converted. Seeing my dad play against the Yankees as the Mets, with Bobby Bonilla and all my other favorite players, cemented the deal. We played the game for hours that day, and when my dad finally went to sleep, I played it and several other games on the system by myself.

MLBPA Baseball was my gateway drug to the rest of the Super Nintendo library. Without it, I may have never been exposed to *Chrono Trigger*, *EarthBound*, *Super Mario RPG*, *Super Castlevania IV*, and countless other wonderful games on the system. –Patrick Hickey Jr.

Schiffer Publishing, LTD

Mohawk and Headphone Jack

PUBLISHER: Black Pearl Software.
DEVELOPER: Solid Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1996.

The title character in this crazy platformer is a muscular, shades-wearing, yellow, naked guy with a purple mohawk that goes down his back. He also has a CD player strapped to his side. A walking parody of the early 1990s (or he might as well be), Mohawk moves quickly up and down hills and rolls into a ball to battle enemies like Sonic the Hedgehog. He can also sprout wings, stick to walls, turn into a sea creature, explode a limited number of times to destroy enemies, and more. The levels are oddly designed in terms of gravity. There's no true "up" as different ceilings and floors have their own center of gravity, frequently rotating the screen (via Mode 7 effects) as you run and jump from one place to another. This can be quite dizzying.

The game has fourteen levels, ranging from caves to jungles to industrial areas. The controls are solid, but the color palette is exceptionally small, especially for an SNES game. The first area, for example, is almost entirely gray. Yuck. In addition to battling bad guys (including some creatively designed bosses), Mohawk collects small CDs. Once he has enough, a warp will open to the next level. Mohawk can also grab large CDs that change the in-game music. This odd title is rarely seen in the wild and is especially hard to find complete.

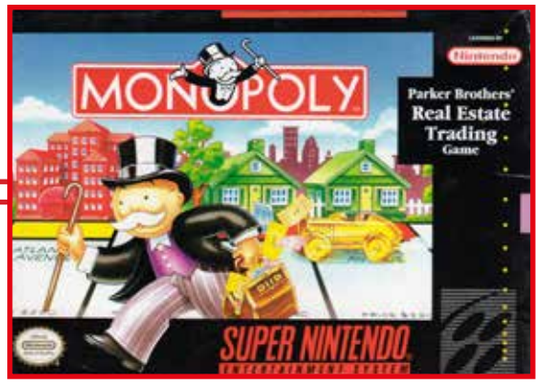
Notable Quotable:

"*Mohawk and Headphone Jack* is the ultimate example of a great game gone bad. It has traits that have made games in the past awesome, but they are butchered so badly to the point that the game is unplayable . . . the protagonist is a total loser . . . the few enemies that appear aren't anything interesting. They do exactly nothing except sit in the same damn spot . . . The levels are just as repetitive and dull as the enemies. You will travel to several different settings, such as on land, in pipes, and in water, but they are all the same area disguised as something else . . . The ability to flip the direction of the gravitational pull while attempting to get through a maze might sound cool, but in reality it's a total mess . . . I usually play games until the end, but I just couldn't stand this game anymore. It took me hours (with maps by *Nintendo Power*) to get there, and I just couldn't take any more nauseating spinning around in endless mazes." –Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Starfire Publishing

Monopoly

PUBLISHER: Parker Brothers.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Board Game, 1–8 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1992.



Parker Brothers' famous board game is recreated very nicely for the Super Nintendo. Up to eight players take turns rolling dice (with a digitized hand), moving a token around the board, earning money, drawing Community Chest and Chance cards, and trying to bankrupt the other players by purchasing, renting, and selling houses, hotels, railroads, and other properties. The advantage of the video version lies in the computer handling all the accounting and money management tasks, giving the game a faster pace than its more tangible, more tactile counterpart. Cartoon-like animations, a game editor (for giving players cash and properties before the game even begins), voice effects, and a timed mode add to the fun. An exceedingly common game, *Monopoly* for the SNES often shows up complete in the wild because it was later re-released by Majesco sales. The game was also adapted for the NES, Game Boy Advance, Genesis, and numerous other consoles.

Notable Quotable:

"A fairly accurate replication of *the* timeless board game classic. All of the official rules are present, but some customized house rules (i.e. the free parking pool contributions) which add a bit of spice to the ever-present monotony of the game are not available. However, some welcome options convert this time-consuming strategy game into a party game. These include preset game situations, timed games, and assigned property acquisitions. All acquisitions can be displayed, but I found it to be more convenient to keep track of property by using the title deeds from the original board game. The graphics are clean-cut . . . The sound effects, though sharp, are too sparse . . . Hardcore *Monopoly* enthusiasts should feel quite pleased with the overall product, but SNES owners should only snatch this up at a bargain price." –Kevin Oleniacz (*Digital Press* fanzine #22, November/December 1994)

Insider Insight:

Flashback to a snowed-in evening in 1993; NW 23rd and Burnside Boulevard, in Portland, Oregon, looks like a storm scene from the movie, *The Day After Tomorrow*. Ice has formed and is precariously bending branches over the powerlines as we pass under. Below, in the heart of the city, the power is already out. Two feet of snow has closed down the main boulevard, save for two brave drivers who tried to make it up the hill, now stranded at the side of the road, their headlights shining dimly through the blizzard like beacons on an alien craft. Me and my friend, holding onto each other to keep from slipping in the fury of a rare storm, hit the convenience store for supplies, thankful that the place is still open.

Two-liter bottles of Coke . . . check.

Beer and wine . . . check

Pizza pockets . . . check

Major assortment of cookies . . . check

Bags of Fritos and bean dip . . . check

We are on a mission to make the most of what we know will be at least two days of immobility in a West Coast city unaccustomed to snowfall of any magnitude. None of us will be able to make it into work. Oh, the humanity. What shall we do?! How we plan on dealing with that—if the power stays on, that is—is lots of caffeine, junk food, alcohol, and video games with friends, as well as hanging with some that don't really play video games . . . but that's okay. We've got that covered, too. We have *Monopoly* on the SNES.

No matter how old or young you are . . . you know this game. You played it for the first time as a five-year-old with your parents, who most likely played it with their parents, who played it with theirs. *Monopoly* is known to generations as being the one game everybody knows how to play. No matter the format, whether you play it old school as a board game or on a modern electronic system, it's an instant crowd-pleaser. Even those not playing enjoy the spectator-sport feeling of it as well.

Anyway, the next two snow days passed in a whirl of *Monopoly* evenings set to a musical soundtrack by Radiohead, Nirvana, and The Beastie Boys going "Intergalactic." Just me and some pals, riding out the storm, listening to tunes, chilling with Rich Uncle Pennybags while the city slept quietly under a deep blanket of snow. –Catherine DeSpira

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.

Mortal Kombat

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1993.

Like its Genesis counterpart, *Mortal Kombat* for the SNES, which is based on Midway's violent 1992 arcade game, was released September 13, 1993, a day infamously known as "Mortal Monday." However, much to the dismay of many Nintendo fans, the SNES cartridge was watered down to be more family friendly. Genesis users could input a code (ABACABB, which was in reference to Abacab, the album by the Phil Collins-led rock band, Genesis) to allow blood and uncensored Fatalities, such as ripping out your opponent's spine or cutting them in half. However, in the SNES game the blood is gray (to resemble sweat), and most of the Fatalities were replaced with less violent finishing moves. The SNES version has superior graphics, more animations, and better sound, but the Genesis game has more responsive controls, and of course it's considered much cooler.

The one-on-one fighting evokes *Street Fighter II*, but with digitized graphics and a Shaolin Tournament storyline in which noble warriors from around the globe compete for honor and glory. Gamers can fight as one of seven different punching, kicking, crouching, blocking characters: Johnny Cage, Liu Kang, Sonya Blade, Kano, Raiden, Sub-Zero, or Scorpion, each with his or her own special moves, such as fireball, cannonball, deep freeze, lightning, leg grab, flying kick, flying thunderbolt, or shadow kick. Matches are best two out of three, and every few fights there's a "Test Your Might" mini-game where you press buttons quickly to break wood, stone, steel, ruby, or diamond with your bare hands. Bosses to battle include Goro, a creature with four arms, and Shang Tsung, an evil sorcerer who steals the souls of his victims. *Mortal Kombat* was also released for the Game Boy and Game Gear. The Sega CD version was augmented with new animations and enhanced sound. In 2011, the game was reimagined for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, and in 2012 for the PlayStation Vita.

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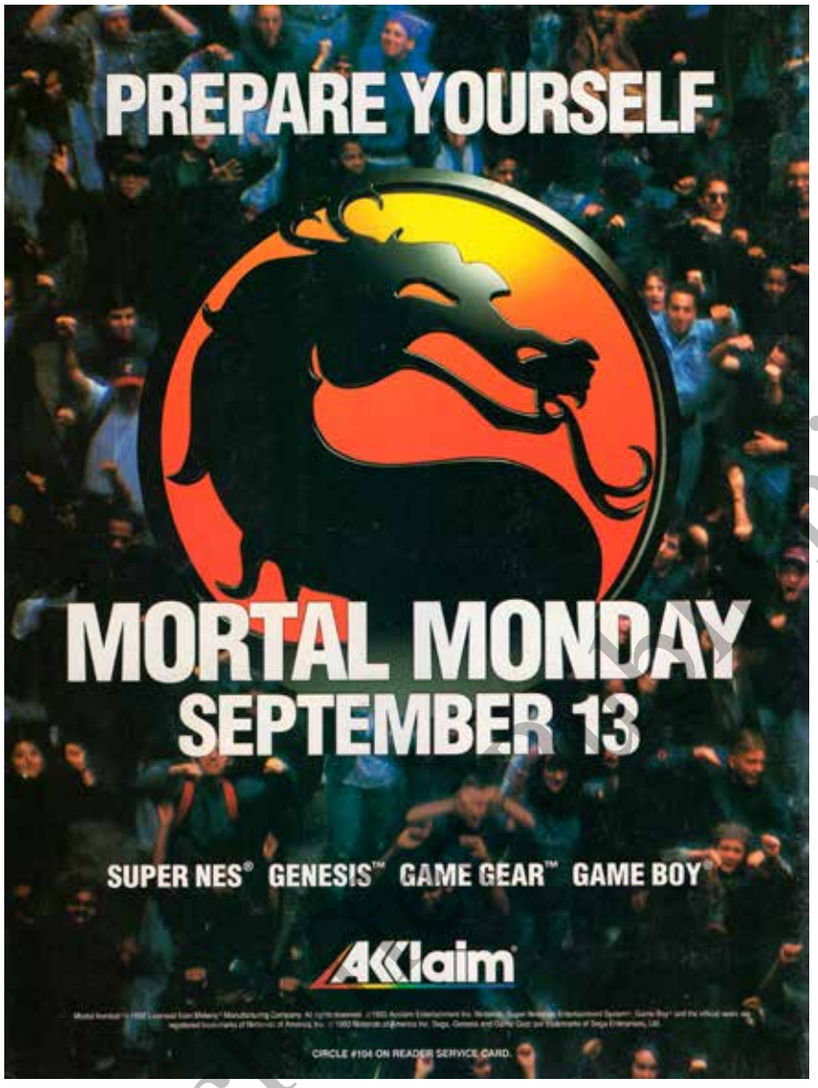

Insider Insight:
September 13, 1993, aka "Mortal Monday," was the day that I finally understood the console wars. As a huge *Mortal Kombat* fan, the idea of having a version that I could play at home was very exciting. I was spending close to $5 a day playing it in the arcade at this point, a significant sum of money for a college student. But for a one-time purchase I could play as much as I wanted! The hype leading up to the release was like nothing I had seen before. Sure, there were other commercials for video games, but this was something more. The ads seemed to run non-stop and were aimed right at me. There was no doubt I was going to have this game the day it came out. And it was going to be incredible, right?

The only console I had in my apartment was a Super Nintendo, so that was the clear choice for me. But it wasn't going to matter. The Super Nintendo is fully capable of playing it in all of its glory. It already had a great version of *Street Fighter II*, so I had no reason to suspect anything would be wrong with this release.

On Mortal Monday I went down to the local Software Etc. and plopped down the money for my copy as planned. There wasn't going to be any studying for me that day, and I cut classes. I was going to play all the *Mortal Kombat* I wanted, and life was good! As in the arcades, I picked Johnny Cage and began my first fight. What I was met with was not quite what I had expected. The gameplay itself was okay, and it felt like *Mortal Kombat*, but something was off. Where was all the blood? I wouldn't have thought that a change from blood to sweat would have mattered, but it did. Seems the gore was a bigger part of the game than I had ever imagined. I was a bit disappointed, but it was about to get worse.

As I spent a good amount of time playing Johnny Cage, I easily won my first match and dutifully did the Fatality. That's when the reality of what I had just bought fully sunk in. Instead of upper-cutting my opponent's head off in a fountain of blood, Johnny did some kind of tickle maneuver with his foot. Disappointment was in full swing at this point. The game was still fun to play, but it just wasn't the same and certainly wasn't the definitive version.

Prior to this, I hadn't really worried about how the same release on a different console could be better or worse. I simply bought the games I wanted on the console I had and enjoyed them. But on a later trip back to Software Etc., I saw *Mortal Kombat* running on a Genesis kiosk. The final kick to the gut was seeing not only blood, but the original Fatalities. This was the *Mortal Kombat* I wanted. Not the censored Nintendo version. I wanted the blood, guts, and gore. For the first time ever, I lusted after a game on a console I didn't own. The mighty Super Nintendo had let me down. –Darren Sulfridge

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Mortal Kombat II

PUBLISHER: Acclaim Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.

A favorite among fans of the series, *Mortal Kombat II*, which improves upon the original with larger characters, faster gameplay, and more varied Fatality finishing moves, was released to the arcades by Midway in 1993. The SNES version is a largely faithful port, featuring digitized graphics, good controls, and, unlike the first *Mortal Kombat* for the system, red blood. Fighters, engaging in a series of one-on-one fights, have returned to the battle arena for a tournament held by the evil shape-shifting demon Shang Tsung of the Outworld.

All of the playable fighters from the first *Mortal Kombat* are included, plus five new ones: Baraka, a warlord of Outworld's nomadic Tarkatan race; Jackson "Jax" Briggs, a U.S. Special Forces officer; Kitana, a female ninja; Kung Lao, a Shaolin monk; and Mileena, Kitana's twin sister who doubles as an assassin for Kahn. Each character can block, crouch, jump, flip forward and back, punch low and high, and kick low and high, along with pull off such advanced moves as uppercut, foot sweep, round house, flying punch, and flying kick. Each character also has his or her own special moves, such as ground pound, sonic wave, teleport kick, sai throw, blade swipe, spear, and/or scissor takedown, and each has different strengths and weaknesses in terms of speed and movement.

There are five difficulty levels from which to choose: very easy, easy, medium, hard, and very hard. In two-player mode, you can use a handicap feature that lets two players of unequal skill compete on a more level playing field. The SNES version of *Mortal Kombat II* has better graphics and sounds than its Genesis counterpart, but both are excellent. *MKII* was ported to numerous other consoles, including the Game Boy, Game Gear, and PlayStation, and it spawned a direct spinoff, *Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks* for the PlayStation 2 and Xbox.

Notable Quotable:

"After the release of the original *Mortal Kombat*, Nintendo got slammed for the censorship of the game. And so, after sticking a label to the box of the SNES version that warned it was for Mature Audiences only, *Mortal Kombat* would finally see an unedited release to Nintendo consoles. It also plays much better, with the controls being much more responsive than the SNES port of the original game. While the graphics and sound can't quite match up with the arcade, the tradeoff is that there's a secret Team Battle mode. In this mode, two players pick four characters and fight it out, with a new character appearing whenever one loses all their health, sort of like *King of Fighters*. Interestingly enough, while the Western versions of this port are uncensored, the Japanese version has green blood. The screen also fades to black-and-white whenever a fatality's performed, although the actual fatalities themselves are unchanged." –Hardcore Gaming 101 (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

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Insider Insight:
Anticipation for the home versions of *Mortal Kombat II* was intense. Gamers like me and my friends couldn't wait for this title to come out, mainly due to the fact that it was going to be uncensored, which stood in contrast to Nintendo's strict policies. When it was finally released, we played it all day, breaking only to go out and eat junk food. *Mortal Kombat II* had us yelling "Toasty!" and performing a myriad array of finishing moves. Favorites included Liu Kang's disco dance friendship and Johnny Cage's autograph finisher. It was such a good conversion, we pretty much stopped playing the arcade game. –Stephen Smith

Insider Insight:
As a kid, I was into horror and gore, probably to resist the innocent image people had of me because of my disability. This dislike of projected saccharine led me to violent games, *Mortal Kombat II* being one of them. It was one of the first fighting games I played, and the most gruesome. My mom shielded us from graphic content (the opposite of my father, who let us watch R-rated movies), but she oddly had no problem with virtual video game bloodshed.

In *Mortal Kombat II*, my brother and I took turns attacking the A.I. character, and then we'd go against each other in a battle toward those sick Fatalities. He would often play as Sub-Zero (the spine-rip being a highlight of the game), and I'd go with Kitana and her deadly fan blades; flinging those things was satisfying to my budding feminist self. My in-game strategy was to press whatever buttons I could, timing them perfectly to shield myself from incoming attacks. This method resulted in surprise combos that dealt massive damage, so it worked well. When I won a match, I'd unleash the sequence of buttons to end on a Fatality—the more blood, the better. I never warmed up to the Babalities or Friendship finishing moves, unsurprisingly. –Erin Hawley

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Mortal Kombat 3

PUBLISHER: Williams Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Sculptured Software.
GAME TYPE: Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1995.

Retaining the blood, gory attacks, and hard-hitting action that helped make the series popular, Midway's *Mortal Kombat 3* hit the arcades in 1995. While the one-on-one formula remained intact, the storyline dispensed with the tournament in favor of the evil antics of Shao Kahn (voiced by pinball designer Steve Ritchie), who actually didn't die at the end of *Mortal Kombat II*, having a new plan to conquer Earthrealm.

Mortal Kombat 3 introduced other, more important elements as well, including Animalities (Fatalities where fighters turn into animals), combos (predefined button presses used to perform a series of consecutive attacks), and a run button, which made players dash toward their opponent. The run button, which empties a meter when you use it, sped up the game as well as made it more offense-intensive.

The SNES port retains these features, as well as the lineup of fighters. Many arcade and SNES fans were disappointed with the exclusion of Scorpion and Reptile. Returning fighters include Jax, Kano, Black Dragon, Kung Lao, Liu Kang, Sonya Blade, Sub-Zero, Rogue Lin, Shang Tsung, and Smoke. New playable characters include: Cyrax, a cyber assassin; Kabal, a former Black Dragon warrior; Nightwolf, a Native American shaman; Sektor, a cyber assassin; Sindel, the resurrected Queen of Edenia who is being controlled by Shao Kahn; Sheeva, a female Shokan; and Stryker, a riot control officer. Bosses include a centaur called Motaro and Shao Kahn, Emperor of Outworld.

Mortal Kombat 3 was also ported to the Game Boy and PlayStation, along with appearing in such collections as *Midway Arcade Treasures 2* for the GameCube, PlayStation 2, and Xbox. Followed by *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* (arcade, SNES, Game Boy Advance, Saturn).

Notable Quotable:

"The Super Nintendo version isn't so hot in the graphical and sound departments, with sprites that are a little under half the size of the arcade and some rather muffled sound. It plays pretty closely to the arcade, though, once you set the controls to something other than the default layout. What really makes this port interesting, however, are the cheat menus, of which there are three to unlock . . . you've got options that let you use Motaro and Shao Kahn as playable characters . . . Also, there's an option to enable pausing the game. Yes, you have to use cheats to pause the game . . . The Genesis version looks about the same as the Super Nintendo version, if a little more washed out. It plays pretty close to the SNES version, too, which means that despite its grainy look and poor sound quality, it still plays pretty well." –Hardcore Gaming 101 (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Insider Insight:

The original *Mortal Kombat* for the SNES was a lackluster port, and not because Nintendo censored it. It simply didn't capture the feel and excitement of the arcade title. *Mortal Kombat II*, however, is one of my favorite arcade ports across all generations. It isn't pixel perfect, but it shines. While *Mortal Kombat 3* marks the start of the decline in the series, my anticipation was still high for a home version. But which to get?

I'm a Sega guy, and while previous Genesis ports captured the feel and speed of the arcade, they were incomplete, especially when it came to certain animations and sound effects. The then-new Saturn could have handled an accurate port, but Sony had a timed exclusive involving the 32-bit rights for the then-new PlayStation. After some debate, I opted for the SNES version. I purchased an SNES just for *MKII* after all, so this port has to be just as good, right?

MK3 for the SNES is a competent port, but expectations coupled with a translation of a somewhat lackluster arcade game started to sour me on the series. To make matters worse, the Genesis version, while as rough and grainy as any game I'd seen on the system, felt faithful and alive. It's those high expectations for SNES and low expectations for Genesis that really color my view of the ports, and both are games I don't care to revisit again. Oh, well, we'll always have Paris and that killer *MKII* port. –Rob Faraldi

Schiffer Publishing, Ltd

Mr. Do!

PUBLISHER: Black Pearl Software.
DEVELOPER: Imagineer.
GAME TYPE: Maze, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
YEAR: 1996.

Despite some slowdown and controls that aren't quite as precise, *Mr. Do!* is an excellent port of Universal's 1982 arcade classic, which is one of the most strategy-intensive maze games ever created. Players guide Mr. Do, an odd little clown, as he digs tunnels (à la *Dig Dug*) and gobbles rows of cherries. Eating cherries plays the "do-re-mi" scale, and eating a grouping of eight cherries in succession grants gamers extra points. Mr. Do also throws a power ball at dinosaur-like enemies (similar to the ghosts in *Pac-Man*) that prowl the maze in hot pursuit.

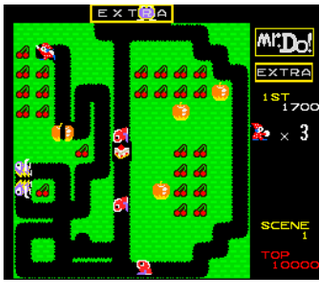
As Mr. Do digs tunnels, he alters the maze, meaning the game is different each time you play it (compounding this is that enemies will sometimes transform into monsters that can dig tunnels as well). After Mr. Do throws the ball and kills an enemy, the ball will reappear in his hands a few seconds later. However, if the ball gets stuck in limbo, bouncing around the tunnels somewhere without hitting an enemy, Mr. Do should retrieve the ball himself, which can create a lot of nervous excitement. A more lucrative way to kill enemies is to guide Mr. Do to walk under apples to drop them on top of enemies (killing multiple monsters with a single apple is a good way to score tons of points). Unlike the rocks in *Dig Dug*, which serve a similar purpose, the apples can be pushed along the floors of the maze pathways. One strategy is to dig traps for the monsters and push apples on top of them.

Near the center of each maze lies a food item, which when eaten brings forth an Alphamonster and his henchmen (who can eat apples). Killing Alphamonsters, each of which contains a letter, can eventually spell out EXTRA, granting players an additional life, playing a cutscene, awarding bonus points, and advancing the game to the next maze. (An Alphamonster also appears on the playfield with each 5,000 points scored.) Level progression otherwise requires eating all the cherries, killing all the enemies, or grabbing a sparkling diamond that will occasionally pop up. Picking up this rare, randomly appearing gemstone scores 10,000 points (in the arcade game, you got 8,000 points and an extra credit on the machine) and plays a perky rendition of the popular English lullaby, "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."

The cartridge also includes an SNES exclusive two-player Battle Mode. This highly competitive option has similar tunnel-digging, monster-avoiding gameplay, but it pits a blue Mr. Do against a pink Mr. Do (or should that be Ms. Do?) as they can shoot magic balls at one another as well as the enemies. Not only is this mode great competition, it's good for lots of laughs. Vastly superior to the SNES rendition of *Frogger*, *Mr. Do!* is a must-own for the system. Released the same year as *Neo Mr. Do!* (arcade).

Memories:
As a gaming author, I'm a frequent guest and vendor at various video game conventions. I sometimes do Q&A panels, where I discuss my history in gaming before opening things up for questions from the audience. By far the most frequent question I get is to name my favorite video game of all time. My answer is always the same: *Mr. Do!*

My sole *Game Informer* publishing credit is in the September 2002 issue, #113. It's a review of *Mr. Do!* for the late, lamented "Greatest Game of All Time" column.



Here's part of what I wrote: "Despite a mere two megs of power and a distinct lack of graphical sophistication, *Mr. Do!* for the Super NES is sheer gameplay excellence, offering up a killer rendition of the vastly underrated Universal coin-op classic . . . *Mr. Do!* is often dismissed as a poor-man's *Dig Dug* by the philistines of the gaming world. While it was indeed inspired by that great game, it's an excellent title in its own right. Throwing a ball at enemies may not be as satisfying as blowing them up with a pump, but watching helplessly as the ball bounces around the tunnels, missing the enemies when you desperately need the ball back, is excruciating—but in an exhilarating kind of way. More importantly, spelling out EXTRA adds an additional dimension to the action, and the 'pushable' apples in *Mr. Do!* are far more versatile

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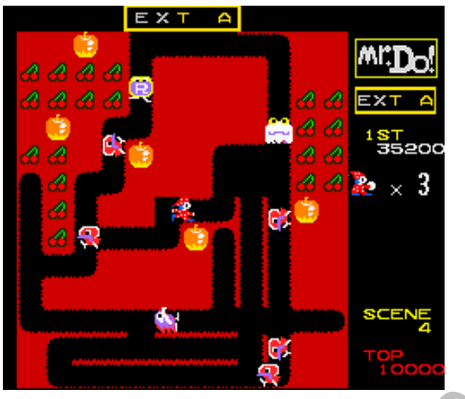
than the 'unpushable' rocks in *Dig Dug* . . . strategically diverse and endlessly entertaining . . . smooth difficulty progression, meaning anyone can play. In later levels, it takes tremendous skill to survive, but the game never gets frustrating . . . So, what makes this version superior to the arcade original? Nothing less than a two-player Battle Mode that pits one clown against another!"

Notable Quotable:

"SNES provided us with a superb port of this golden era hit. Screen design and color are almost perfect, with slight distortion due to the difference in aspects between an arcade monitor and television screen. The playfields still capture the pastels and caddy-corner shades of the arcade brilliantly with only a slight resolution softening . . . Sound samples are, for the most part, dead-on . . . character animations and gameplay are solid . . . Slowdown is noticeable during an apple drop over a long distance . . . Slowdown also rears its ugly head during ball regeneration when



the action gets hot and heavy . . . The game fields look damn good, the sounds are top-notch, the integrity of the original game is maintained down to the familiar (un) animated cut sequences between levels, and Nintendo even threw in a kickass head-to-head variant that, despite suffering from slowdown a little too often, shows the programmers put thought and enthusiasm into their work." –Don Evanoff (*Digital Press* fanzine #48, March/April 2002)

Insider Insight:

Back in the '80s my wife and I were avid arcade junkies; we played many games and really enjoyed *Dig Dug*. One day we spotted a new game in our favorite arcade called *Mr. Do!* We were intrigued—it had the same digging-underground gameplay we enjoyed in *Dig Dug*, but it had so much more! A magic ball you can throw and have it bounce around the maze, monsters to spell out the word EXTRA for a cool bonus, and even an elusive diamond to get you a free credit! We were really hooked on this game for quite some time. Then in the late '90s while my wife and I were in the video game aisle of our local Toys"R"Us, she spotted it! A *Mr. Do!* game for the SNES! It was an immediate purchase and so well worth it. We especially liked the head-to-head two-player mode! We spent many a night laughing and having a great time playing this game. We still enjoy it on our SNES today! –William Culver

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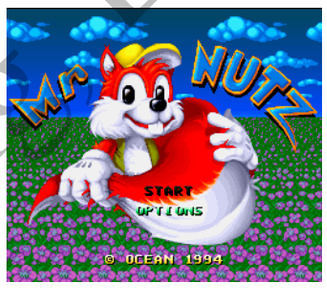
Mr. Nutz

PUBLISHER: Ocean of America.
DEVELOPER: Ocean Software.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1994.

In *Mr. Nutz*, players guide an anthropomorphic red "SuperSquirrel" through eight themed, lushly illustrated, multi-level worlds, running up and down hills, collecting acorns to throw at enemies, whipping enemies with his big bushy tail, jumping on enemies and over such obstacles as spike pits and giant hammers, and jumping on platforms, some of which move, and some of which are suspended in mid-air. He also rides pulleys, swims, collects coins (for points and completion bonus), swings on ropes, dodges streams of water, manipulates objects to solve simple puzzles, and pushes items to create platforms for reaching higher areas. There are even sections where Mr. Nutz spins through loops like Sonic the Hedgehog.

In short, *Mr. Nutz* is the type of cute, colorful, quirky platformer that was so prevalent during the 16-bit era. Some of the graphics in the game are psychedelic, like something you might find in *Alice in Wonderland*. Worlds to explore include Woody Land (the woods), Adventure Park, The Living Room, Fowl Kitchen, Volcano Underpass, Clouds, Mean Streets, and Ice Scream, each populated by such enemies as birds, bees, scarecrows, snails, giant walking lightbulbs, flying/rotating clown heads, man-eating plants, penguins, walking apples, spear-throwing Eskimo-types, and/or rolling fur ball creatures. Other than the bosses (such as Mr. Spider, Vulture Witch, Octopus, and Clown), most of the enemies can be killed with one hit. The final boss is Mr. Blizzard, a yeti whose plan is to "create and rule a new frozen kingdom here on Earth." The Game Boy, Game Boy Color, and Game Boy Advance ports contain passwords for saving progress, but this version, which is pretty hard to find in the wild, does not. The title character also starred in *Mr. Nutz: Hoppin' Mad* for the Commodore Amiga.



Notable Quotable:

"It's got such an arcade appeal, if it was stuck in a cabinet, you'd look for a coin slot . . . The squirrel is a spritely sprite, jovially strutting along . . . using one excellent attack . . . The other characters are also impressive . . . Each zone is large and graphically different from the last. The kitchen area is especially good; the furniture is bold and beautiful, full of color and detail. Perhaps there are just a few too many precise jumps required; a real drag if you fall from a great height back to the very bottom of the level, and play often verges on the near impossible, which can irritate. Well-timed jumps and accurate nut throwing make for lasting gameplay—what's a game without challenge, anyway? *Mr. Nutz* exudes quality and though it's—excuse this—a hard nut to crack, the presentation/cuteness combination preserves its sell-by date for a long time to come." –*SNES Force* (December 1993)

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Ms. Pac-Man

PUBLISHER: Williams Entertainment.
DEVELOPER: Digital Eclipse Software.
GAME TYPE: Maze, 1 or 2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
YEAR: 1996.

Ms. Pac-Man for the SNES includes a fairly accurate port of Midway's 1981 arcade classic, but it also offers a host of unconventional features, including the use of a Pac Booster, which makes Ms. Pac-Man and Pac-Man (who player two controls in simultaneous mode) move faster and leave speed streaks in their wake. Other unorthodox options include: a pair of rousingly good two-player simultaneous modes (Cooperative and Competitive); four difficulty levels (easy, normal, hard, and crazy); and thirty-six different mazes, including Big, Strange, Arcade, and Mini, the last of which cuts down on vertical scrolling. The NES (Tengen version) and Genesis renditions of *Ms. Pac-Man* also boast these special (and largely cool) features.

For the two or three of you who don't know, the game has players guiding the titular femme around a maze, gobbling up pellets while avoiding four ghosts. Eating bouncing fruit grants bonus points while gobbling Power Pellets lets Ms. Pac-Man temporarily turn the tables on the ghosts. *Ms. Pac-Man* was also released (without gimmicky options) for the Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Game Boy, and numerous other systems. Followed by *Ms. Pac-Man: Special Color Edition* (Game Boy Color) and *Ms. Pac-Man: Maze Madness* (Game Boy Advance, Nintendo 64, PlayStation, Dreamcast).

Notable Quotable:
"What is there to really say about *Ms. Pac-Man*? The original arcade was a whole lot of fun. Sure, it wasn't a *Mario 64* with the flashy graphics, but it was a blast to play. This new version of *Ms. Pac-Man* for the Super NES is the same way. It doesn't have scaling and rotation effects. It doesn't have cool sounds or cool graphics. For some, I can see how this is old-fashioned, but for me it's refreshing. I liked all of the various modes you can change like the size of the board and the type. The turbo addition is a nice touch, too. I was a little surprised to see slowdown at times when the board scrolled up or down." –*Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1996)

Notable Quotable:
"[The options and modes] go a long way towards making an already infinitely replayable game even better in most respects. There's something for gamers of every skill level in this package, and it gives *Pac-Man* aficionados some new levels to put their skills to the test . . . The game has been given a graphical facelift. Admittedly, there isn't a lot of room for artistic interpretation with *Ms. Pac-Man*, but the sprites are larger and more defined. As a result, most mazes are also longer vertically and no longer fit within the confines of a single screen. This comes with an up side and a down side. The aesthetic is cute, and it's about as 16-bit as you can make a simplistic game such as this, but it also means you cannot always see the position of the ghosts on screen. You can pause the game and scroll the screen to get a better view, but constantly interrupting the action isn't ideal. On the other hand, it does force the player to adapt faster and sometimes change their strategy, but purists may find it an unwelcome change." –Player 1 Start (p1start.typepad.com)

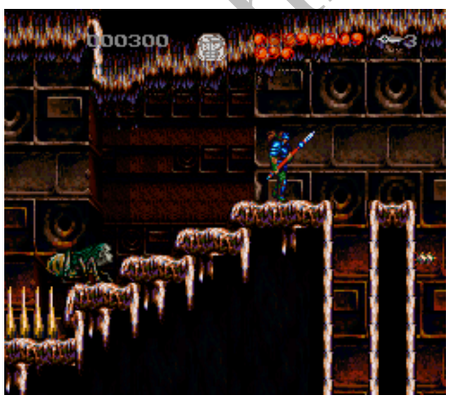
Snifter Publishing LLC

Musya: *The Classic Japanese Tale of Horror*

PUBLISHER: Seta U.S.A.
DEVELOPER: Jorudan.
GAME TYPE: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
YEAR: 1992.

A poor man's *Castlevania*, *Musya* has players guiding a young samurai named Imoto into the abyss in order to recover a sacred talisman that will trap the Evil One. Imoto wields a spinning, thrusting (forward and downward) spear and can use magic (including thunder and flame) against an exotic assortment of creatures. You can hold up to four scrolls of each of the five spells and replenish said spells by finding items. While spinning, the spear can block projectiles. There are forty enemy types to contend with, including golems, winged beasts, and stone statues, and seven stages to battle through: Tengumura Cavern, Catacombs, Palace of Hate, Cave of Darkness, Catacombs of Akuma, Cursed Palace, and Watery Prison.

In addition to walking, spearing enemies, using magic, jumping on platforms and over obstacles, and avoiding moving spikes and the like, the samurai can crouch while slowly moving backwards with his spear held out before him. He can also perform a super jump. Other than a semi-interesting storyline based on Japanese mythology, this straight-forward action game has little to offer in the way of a good time as gameplay is hindered by sluggish controls, small characters, a weak standard weapon (which, to be fair, can be powered up) and frustrating platform-jumping.



Notable Quotable:

"The American version of *Musya* was slightly edited. In the first stage, the large Tanuki boss from the Japanese game was changed and the large 'testicles' edited out. The power menu was also changed and the small swastika crosses removed. Controls are also slightly different; Imoto can jump higher in the American version and can change direction while attacking . . . *Musya* is a tedious and unrewarding game . . . enemies need to take an atrocious amount of hits before they finally go down, which sometimes doesn't even matter as they just keep respawning again and again . . . the designers decided to recycle levels later in the game—I knew about 'boss recycling,' but entire stages? What a shame!" –Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Notable Quotable:

"While the enemy designs are good, all of the sprites are extremely small, with minimal animation. There's also a lot of slowdown, as the game often employs a dithered 'transparent' fog effect that is barely visible, only making the game more tedious instead of adding to its attempted foreboding atmosphere. The effects for the spells are extremely plain also, failing to have any real sense of impact (especially when the ones that damage enemies result in new enemies almost immediately reappearing anyway). Interestingly, one of the graphic designers, Takanori Wada, must have taken a liking to small monster designs, as he went on to do graphic design for several Pokemon games in the early 2000s. The worst thing about *Musya*'s graphics, however, is that the backgrounds are great . . . The backgrounds feel like they belong in a much more polished game compared to the tiny, poorly animated sprites and grating soundtrack. *Musya* is the kind of game that had some talent and good ideas behind it, but is so much less than the sum of its parts." –Chris Rasa (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

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THE CONSOLE WARS

By Rusel DeMaria

In 1985, in the wake of the Great Video Game Crash of 1983/84, Nintendo repurposed their Famicom computer and released it in the U.S. as the Nintendo Entertainment System. For the next few years, the NES grew in popularity, with an amazing lineup of games, including *Super Mario Bros.* and *The Legend of Zelda*, both created by Nintendo's secret weapon—Shigeru Miyamoto. These megahit games, along with such titles as *Contra*, *Metroid*, the Mega Man series, *Castlevania*, *Punch-Out!!*, *Final Fantasy*, *Dragon Warrior*, and, well, too many to list, were some of the must-have, must-play games of the era. You had to be there. It was awesome.

By 1989, the NES was king with millions of units in homes all around America and the world.

Nintendo had some competition from Sega's Master System, released in the U.S. in 1986, and NEC's TurboGrafx-16, released in the U.S in 1989. Sega countered with the Mega Drive in Japan, which became the Genesis in the U.S., a true 16-bit home console system. Despite its name, TurboGrafx had an 8-bit CPU, although a 16-bit color processor.

So where was Nintendo? The NES was still going strong, and it took some time for the Genesis to catch on—its initial sales were good, but not great, not NES numbers. From Nintendo's perspective, there was nothing to worry about. Peter Main, Nintendo's VP of sales and marketing said, "Being first to market is not our primary concern." Their business plan was already set to carry the NES until 1991, when they would release their next console.

But Sega was playing hardball. They recruited former Mattel president Tom Kalinske, who said: "I was on vacation when Nakayama found me. He and [Sega founder Dave] Rosen ganged up on me and convinced me to fly to Tokyo to see the Genesis and the product that became the Game Gear. Some months later, I got excited enough about it to go in and take on Nintendo."

Meanwhile, Sega knew that they had to come up with a killer app. Sonic was the result of an internal contest, where employees were encouraged to come up with a Mario-killer game. It came down to two simple drawings. One had a picture of a hedgehog with a blonde human girlfriend named Madonna. The other was described as "a very young preschool-type anime done in pastels."

Several executives came to America to determine which character was the winner. Sega's marketing director Al Nilsen was told to choose. "There was no game design or story," Nilsen said. "Just this image, but it was the less objectionable of the two. So I said, 'Do Sonic, but get rid of Madonna,' and we sent it back to Japan."

After they had developed the *Sonic the Hedgehog* game, the developers wanted to show it immediately at a show in Tokyo, but Sega was not about to let this hedgehog out of the bag. Not just yet. As Nilsen put it, "This could be our secret weapon."

Kalinske made a few changes soon after the Genesis launch. First, he removed the pack-in title *Altered Beast*, saying that it looked like devil worship in the Midwest. Then he aggressively lowered the price from $189 to $129. Then he told the executives in Japan that he was going to bundle their Mario-killer, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, with the console.

"At the end of a long discourse," Kalinske recalled, "all the Japanese executives began buzzing in Japanese, and I didn't have a clue what they were saying. At the end of about an hour of this, Nakayama said finally that nobody in the room agreed with me. They thought bundling *Sonic* would weaken profits." But Kalinske's contract gave him decision-making control. When the time was right, they would unleash *Sonic* as a bundle with the Genesis. But not before.

Sega had about a year's head start in the 16-bit console race, and they used that to build a strong brand and sell a lot of units. Some of us video game journalists thought that maybe Nintendo had screwed up by letting Sega have the 16-bit field to themselves, especially after we got a sneak peek at *Sonic* and an earful of hype from Nilsen.

And even as the launch of the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) was on the horizon (so to speak), Sega continued to play a chess game, publicly stating that they hoped Nintendo wouldn't bundle *Super Mario World* with the new console, but secretly hoping they would. In their head-to-head testing, *Sonic* had outperformed *Mario*. So they held *Sonic* back to try to steal Nintendo's thunder by releasing it at the same time as the SNES.

Sega of America's president, Minoru Arakawa, seemed to have been aware of what was going on at Sega, however. In an interview, he told me, "Tom Kalinske is a brilliant marketer, and the first thing he did was to pick up on a newspaper quote from [Nintendo president Hiroshi] Mr. Yamauchi in which he said, 'Sega is nothing.' Kalinske put it on every door in the Sega offices."

In the end, *Sonic* did really well, boosting sales for the Genesis, but they didn't really blunt Nintendo's success long-term. With *Super Mario World* alone, Nintendo had the kind of game that inspired people to buy their console. The other launch titles, *F-Zero*, *Gradius III*, *Pilotwings*, and *SimCity* weren't killer games, although *Pilotwings* was remarkable in the way it simulated 3D (using Mode 7 that was built into SNES). It was definitely fun to play on the show floor at the 1991 CES in Chicago where it debuted.

But the launch was just the beginning. The Super Nintendo was, in a word, super. Games like *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, *Super Mario Kart*, *Chrono Trigger*, *Secret of Mana*, *Donkey Kong Country*, *EarthBound*, and new and improved versions of their NES hits, like *Mega Man X*, *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior*, *Final Fantasy VI* (*Final Fantasy III* in North America), and *Super Castlevania IV* proved that Nintendo's confidence had been well-founded.

And the rest is history. Well, all of this is history, but you know what I mean. Ultimately, Sega was unable to supplant Nintendo as the market leader, and over the next few years they floundered and left the console wars entirely, in part because another Japanese giant, Sony, became Nintendo's real competition with the PlayStation.

And what about the TurboGrafx-16? They finished a distant third in the console wars, published some good games, but ultimately dropped out of the console race much sooner than Sega, whose arguably best console—the Dreamcast—was also their last.

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EMULATING THE SUPER NINTENDO—HISTORY, LEGALITY, AND ITS VALUE TO THE GAMING WORLD

By Alex McCumbers

One day in the spring of 2009, I sat staring at the dirty ceiling of the Networking Tech. Class at the Calhoun/Gilmer Career Center in West Virginia. It was a boring high school computer class that gave us free reign to learn pretty much whatever we wanted, with many of the students working on solitary creative projects instead of doing the dull required assignments. The only real fun I had in the class was picking apart old computers and piecing a monster together that could at least run Windows XP. It's here that a curious statement was casually said as the answer to a seemingly impossible question, one that would spark an entire career.

Leaning back in a dusty old office chair, I reminisced about the glory days of the Super Nintendo to my friends. During this time, my classmates and I were deeply invested in the online battlefields of *Call of Duty* and *Gears of War* on the Xbox 360, but I stood as the defiant lover of single-player games, which were plentiful on my favorite purple-and-gray, 16-bit box. I groaned that day, lamenting that there should be a way to play these games anywhere, like the Nintendo DS I carried around. I yearned for *Super Metroid* again.

That's when Brandon, with his scruffy beard and Steelers jersey, hollered from his corner of the class, where he was playing *Unreal Tournament* in a LAN with some other kids. The class prodigy was a little rough around the edges, but his programming skills excelled far beyond the rest of us. I'll never forget his words.

"Why don't you just emulate it?"

These words sparked an interest that would drive my pursuits of learning the history of gaming, including emulation.

Emulation is defined simply as software that mimics the software of another computer system. This is how we are still able to run games like *DOOM* from 1993, on a modern PC, by using the common DOSBox emulation program. With this definition we can easily recognize what emulation is in the gaming sense. Playing *Final Fantasy VII* from the PS4's digital marketplace is a form of emulation, while the remake of *Final Fantasy VII* is not emulation.

Emulation is not a new thing.

Super Nintendo emulation is a fairly easy endeavor on even the most basic PC. Starting in the early 1990s, programs such as VSMC and Super Pasofami showed the world how to get started by putting the games on DOS, Windows, and Linux machines of all sorts. The first emulators were basic, with most of them unable to capture the magic of the FX chip found in the cartridges or run at a playable speed.

By 1997, two notable projects merged together to create the capable Snes9X, an emulator still used today and a program that was actually modified for the Wii's Virtual Console. Now, we have almost perfect compatibility for the entire Super Nintendo library, including international releases and prototypes that have only recently been found.

These programs opened up new worlds to me, even though I was late to the emulation scene. I took my love of the Super Nintendo and truly dissected my favorite console, checking out fan translations of games that never made it to the U.S. and playing some crazy-hard Mario levels in rom hacks. I tried playing the games with weird PC controllers, just to see how it changed the game. Visual filters changed my favorite adventures, upping the resolution or blurring the pixels to make them more modern. For me, emulation fostered exploration and a hunger for knowledge.

While I was searching for roms and soaking in the vast wealth of knowledge in experiencing them, there was always that looming threat of piracy. This was the age where commercials showed kids downloading music in their basements, only to be visited by the FBI. It was something that many of us computer kids feared, but only sought to delay us the treasures of a medium afraid of keeping all games in distribution, unlike film, literature, or music.

Think of an old film: chances are it's readily available across multiple services online and was probably produced on DVD, Blu-ray, VHS, and maybe even laser disc. Famous works of literature are frequently republished, with added insight from other authors or in new binding. Music is catalogued digitally by services like iTunes and Spotify. Video games have yet to fully embrace this format (relatively speaking), but the fear of legal action still remains.

Emulation is not inherently illegal.

Sure, downloading games with the intent to sell them could result in fines or even jail time, but just owning roms isn't a one-way ticket to Guantanamo Bay. However, there has never been a ruling in the court of law that makes emulation illegal. Companies have sued other companies that offered commercial emulators, but the courts never deemed emulation as a whole illegal. Even the reverse engineering done by some of those companies to restructure the code or add in new code was deemed "fair use." The problem is that the word "emulation" has layers of negative meaning that it doesn't really deserve.

Many companies do offer older games as a product. Unfortunately, the version of the game being distributed is oftentimes an inferior version of the original. This begs the question of why developers don't just use emulation themselves. Sometimes they do, but often neglect to inform the user. For example, an interesting discovery was shared during the 2016 GDC talk, "It's Just Emulation, the Challenge of Selling Old Games." More than likely, the same file used to play *Super Mario Bros.* (NES) on the Virtual Console is the same as the one developed years ago, which is made evident when comparing hex values. Did Nintendo download a rom file created by hackers from the early '90s and sell it to players? It's unclear whether this is the case, but it sure seems like a possibility.

Emulation is beneficial to the game industry.

Oddly enough, many services made in regards to older games are made possible by emulation. We can think of emulation as a translator: it takes the written code and converts it to a form we can enjoy. Nintendo has used a type of emulation for its Virtual Console efforts. Sony does something similar with PlayStation Now. The

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problem is how the industry at large views emulation as a way to get free content, instead of embracing it for use as a tool to bring these experiences to more people.

Not using emulation is a disservice to gaming history. There are thousands of games that may go unplayed or become lost to time without the use of these common programs that even children can use. Losing art to time is never good. We need to delay that degradation as much as possible. Let's use these older games to teach new game designers, share memories with the next generation, and discover new things we didn't know were there.

In the case of Nintendo, consumers seem to want a way to enjoy all of the games throughout the company's history. Sadly, the Virtual Console isn't really the place for this, with often lackluster emulation that leads to inconsistencies and poor performance. These old games are also trickled out, with only a few titles released per week. However, Nintendo could easily archive the Super Nintendo library and just charge a fee for people to use it. Like Netflix, but for games. Sony's PlayStation Now service is similar to this idea, but since the games are streamed and not downloaded, it creates issues for those lacking a high-quality internet connection. Therefore, this theoretical service should have the option for downloading titles for offline enjoyment.

Emulation enables education.

Emulation made me a journalist, game archivist, and lover of gaming history. I've even considered creating games, just because of the ease of emulation software, especially with tools like Lunar Magic, which is a rom hacking tool that lets users create custom levels for *Super Mario World*. Many believe that the communities that grew from Lunar Magic are what sparked the creation of *Mario Maker* for Wii U. This easy way to express ideas through game design leads to a ton of learning, experimentation, and eventually a deeper understanding. Because of rom hacking, I am a better *Mario* player than I would've been if I had stuck to the core games.

That magical day when we first fired up *Super Metroid* on a PC is one that I will never forget. I bonded with that small class in ways I never would've guessed. We studied the game's structure, discussed its place in our culture, and overall enjoyed playing a classic that doesn't deserve to be lost.

Emulation, when used ethically, shouldn't be considered a piracy method—it's a tool that should be used to preserve the history of video games. We as players need to strive to make this happen.

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William Culver began gaming at an early age; his first console was a Unisonic Tournament 2000 *Pong* clone. He's been in the coin-op scene since he was five, back when arcades were filled with electromechanical games. His father was friends with the local arcade owner, so he spent a lot of time there learning how the games worked and how to repair them. He did this up through the mid-1980s. In addition to video games, William likes classic toys. To share his passion for both hobbies, he hosts a YouTube show called Arcade USA. He hosts a number of podcasts as well, including ColecoVisions Podcast, Atari 5200 Super Community Podcast, The Channel F Files, Vectrex Radio, and The Toy Tomb Podcast.

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Keith Haus is an historian and anthropologist who studies video game culture and intercultural history. He travels throughout the Northwest, helping with conventions and meet-ups to better understand the emergent culture. Keith is working on a book of observations on video games as if they were historical texts. For updates, photos, and notes from his various trips, check out Native Videogamer on Facebook.

Kieren Hawken has been writing about video games for more than ten years for many different publications, but he's best known for his work on the award-winning *Retro Gamer* magazine. Other published works include numerous digital books, most notably his popular A-Z series. Kieren was a contributing author on *Let's Go Dizzy: The Story of the Oliver Twins* and *The Story of the Commodore Amiga in Pixels*. In addition, he appeared on the prime time UK technology show *Sky News Swipe*, as well as numerous podcasts as both a guest and co-host. His own YouTube channel, The Laird's Lair, features a wide range of videos focused on the world of retro gaming.

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Matt Henzel, the founder of VideoGameObsession.com, began gaming with a *Pong* clone system, which his parents bought for the family in 1977. His collecting started with the ColecoVision in 1982, and he has bought and collected most every gaming system since. His collection also includes video game books, promotional items, and complete sets of magazines. His website, started in 1996, contains thousands of high-quality, personally scanned and photographed video game covers from his collection. Matt shares these with authors of video documentaries and books on gaming's rich history. In the past, he's helped supply images and

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Mike Hodson has been gaming since the age of two when his father put an Atari 2600 joystick in his hands and powered up *Jungle Hunt*. Years later, his father brought home the new Super Nintendo Entertainment System. Mike was hooked and the rest was history! He has been playing new and classic video games his whole life, but started seriously collecting in the winter of 2013. His first big find was the ultra rare LifeFitness 9XS Exertainment bike for the SNES. From there, "theirontoupee," as he's known on NintendoAge.com, began his journey of collecting history, knowledge, and artifacts of the wonder that is the Exertainment line of products and peripherals

Ken Horowitz is an English professor who has been writing about Sega and video games for more than a decade. Along with articles and reviews for his website, Sega-16 (www.sega-16.com), his work has been published in such magazines as *Hardcore Gamer* and *GamesTM*, as well as several different online sites. Ken is the author of *Playing at the Next Level: A History of American Sega Games*. His next book, *From Altered Beast to Zaxxon: A Celebration of Sega's Arcade Legacy*, chronicles the history of more than sixty Sega arcade games and will be released in 2018.

Zoe K. Howard, author of *November's End*, is a freelance writer and accomplished video game critic. Zoe has been an avid gamer since the early '80s, immersing herself in both the culture and community of video gaming. In 2012, Zoe and her partner Wanda Calamia began the YouTube show, The Retro Gamer Girls, where they celebrate their love for classic gaming. The duo quickly became advocates for equality and supported anti-bullying campaigns amongst gamers. In 2014, Zoe and Wanda were awarded with a Twin Galaxies Video Game Trading Card, representing women in gaming. Zoe is the creator and founder of Retro is Life, (www.retroislife.com), a gaming hive and review website that creates a platform for gamers to explore and experience current games and trends, all while maintaining the preservation of the games we loved as kids and revere into adulthood.

Darran Lee Jones joined *Retro Gamer* magazine in 2005. He's helmed the magazine for "twelve long years," breaking exclusives and speaking to many of his idols who made the games he loved growing up. Darran loves the 16-bit generation (particularly Sega's Mega Drive) and grew up with an Amstrad CPC, but his true passion is with handheld systems like the Game Boy Advance, Nintendo DS, and PS Vita. In his spare time, he's a keen bird photographer.

Steve Juon is a lifelong video game enthusiast and collector who has attended many conventions through the Midwest as both a fan and a presenter, including an exhibition of rare and unusual Mega Man games at the Oklahoma Video Game Expo. He's happily married to his wife Michelle for more than fifteen years, they have an adorable orange tabby named Tango (yes, after *Mega Man V* for GameBoy), and when not pursuing gaming passions he works as a freelance writer and journalist.

Kurt Kalata has been writing about video games, mostly old and weird ones, on the internet for twenty years. In addition to founding retro game website Hardcore Gaming 101 in 2003, he previously started fan sites The Castlevania Dungeon and The Contra HQ. He has also contributed to several other websites, including 1up, Gamasutra, and Siliconera. He has edited and published more than ten books through the HG101 website, including *The Guide to Classic Graphic Adventures* and *The 200 Best Video Games of All Time*. Kurt lives in New Jersey with his wife, daughter, and three cats.

Sam Kennedy, a twenty-year video game industry veteran, launched Gaming-Age.com in the mid-1990s. He went on to write for such publications as *GameFan*, GameSpot, *EGM*, and the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*. In 2003, he launched 1UP.com and oversaw the site through its eventual acquisition by IGN in 2011. Most recently, he marketed such franchises as Call of Duty and Destiny for Activision and then went on to co-found the independent game studio, Tigertron.

Ethan King attended his first gaming convention, the Oklahoma Video Game Expo, in 2012. There he came across two guys asking trivia questions from a table called Nintendo-Okie. A couple of days later, he discovered that Nintendo-Okie had a podcast. After listening to one episode, he became a fan, and after a couple of months he became a member of their site. Inspired by this, he started a podcast of his own called Data Drain.

Russ Kumro is a part-time indie game programmer for a diverse array of platforms, ranging from iOS and Android to retro development for ColecoVision (titles include *Side Trak* and *Rip Cord*). For the past two years, Russ has been working with CollectorVision as the lead programmer of the action title, *Sydney Hunter and the Curse of the Mayan* for PC, Mac, and current-generation consoles. He's also been playing *Castlevania* and *Mega Man* with his son, Austin, which, he says, had a "slight influence" on his recent work. You can reach Russ on Facebook via the CollectorVision page, and you can check out his latest current-gen and ColecoVision releases at www.CollectorVision.com.

Anthony J. La Gambina is a lifelong gamer and collector for all systems and medias. While growing up in the Midwest, he spent a great deal of time in the arcade of Lakeside Bowl in Roselle, Illinois, playing the classic coin-op games of the time. He began collecting with the NES and carries this passion through to today's modern consoles as well as buying and repairing arcade machines and EM pinball machines. Anthony also practices residential architecture and is a Facebook Administrator for the video game collection application GameEye, in addition to beta testing the app and helping to develop new features.

Ben "Random Dave" Lancaster has always been a gamer. In 2006, he began working at a development studio, performing various tasks on titles for Sega, Konami, Codemasters, EA, Microsoft, and Sony. Among his coworkers were several developers who had worked together during the Super Nintendo's heyday. Ben later moved into the world of engineering simulation, which has afforded

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him more free time to create silly homebrew games and other projects in conjunction with the RetroGaming Roundup podcast.

Tim Lapetino is the author of *Art of Atari* and the Executive Director of Museum of Video Game Art (MOVA).

Sulaiman Larokko is a College Technician in the Journalism department at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, New York. He's also a Freelance journalist, actively published on ReviewFix.com, where he's covered Ubisoft's *For Honor* and the Ghost Recon series.

Jeff Lawhead is a published author, indie game composer, and Ocremixer under the name 12 Followers/Meteo Xavier. Check out his websites: www.jslawhead.com and www.meteoxavier.com.

Shawn Long, a.k.a. RGT 85 on YouTube, is a lifelong gamer who began writing in the gaming industry in 2012. Shawn started RGT 85 in 2015, and it has become one of the bigger channels in the retro gaming community, with modern video games mixed in for a complete package.

Larry Luper Jr. became an avid gamer after receiving the Atari VCS one frosty Christmas morning. The addiction grew as Showbiz Pizza opened up in his neck of the woods, after which there was no looking back. As he grew older, his love of comic books and movies equaled his passion for video games. Taking the alter-ego of DC Comics' The Question, Vic Sage, as his nom de plume, Larry began writing for the Retroist (www.retroist.com), and, as fate would have it, works with his best friend at the thriving Arkadia Retrocade in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Rob McCallum is an award-winning filmmaker, documenting subjects like video games, heavy metal, fanboy fanatics, and more. His work has garnered press attention from NBC, CBS, CBC Radio•One, CTV, / Film, WIRED, and Destructoid, and it has appeared in dozens of film festivals. Known for out-of-the-box thinking and fierce determination, McCallum also works as a video game producer for Tiny Titan Studios located in London, Ontario, Canada. He's obsessed with all things Jim Henson, has a deep love of *Masters of the Universe*, and one day wants to visit Duckburg. For more information, visit RobMcCallumFilms.com or TinyTitanStudios.com.

Alex McCumbers hails from the mountains of West Virginia. Always in the pursuit of video game academia, and fighting against all odds to be a writer, he sharpens his mind and skills with daily practice. Find him on Forever Classic (YouTube, Twitch, podcast), Marooners' Rock (maroonersrock.com), and Giga Geek Magazine (www.gigageekmagazine.com).

Matt McMullen is the owner of Enid Retro Toys and Video Games in Enid, Oklahoma.

Delf Meek has been gaming since he begged his parents to buy him an Atari 2600 back in 1981, when he was just five years old. Since then, he has evolved through every gaming system up to modern consoles, but his true love is for the classics. An exhibitor at various gaming conventions in Texas and Oklahoma, Delf enjoys collecting and restoring old game consoles and arcade machines.

Kale Menges has been an avid gamer all his life, starting with the Atari 2600 nearly four decades ago. According to legend, in the early 1980s, when he was just an infant, his mother would prop him up in the arcade cabinet as she played *Pac-Man* while waiting for clothes to dry at the laundromat, the radiation from the CRT warping his imagination and setting his destiny in motion. An artist and graphic designer, Kale has spent the last decade working as a game developer, contributing to a myriad of titles across an array of platforms.

Mike Mertes never could have guessed that his first brush with video games in 1985, on an Intellivision would have a major influence on his life from that day onward. Almost twelve years later, Mike was actively writing classic and modern video game reviews for community newspapers and websites. In 1999, Mike launched his first major website that would eventually set the foundation for www.gamerlogic.net, where he continues to produce reviews, articles, and video content.

Jason Micciche is an award-winning fiction writer and journalist whose work has appeared in numerous publications and has been featured at San Diego Comic-Con. He's currently the owner and editor-in-chief at BrutalGamer.com and has contributed to publications as a video game, toy, and comic book expert. Jason lives in New York with his family and twin Alaskan Malamutes.

Matt Miller is a lifelong gamer and multiple video game world record holder, both as a solo player and as one half of the co-op gaming duo, Team Mayh3m. He has had records published in five books in the Guinness World Records Gamer's Edition series. Matt has been interviewed in a variety of outlets, including Obsolete Gamer, Twin Galaxies, Extended Play Arcade, The Walter Day Collection, and The Retro Junkies Winging It podcast. He also appears in the acclaimed 2015 documentary, *Nintendo Quest*, as well as its companion series, the *Nintendo Quest Power Tour*.

Arda Ocal is a broadcaster with ESPN, MSG Networks, and WWE on his resume. Arda's also been that weather guy in the massive blistering snow storm that resents the anchor in studio saying "it sure looks cold!" after he wraps. A geek at heart, Arda loves all things video games, comics, and nerd culture.

Joshua L. Olson, a.k.a. The Game Grinder on YouTube, is a lifelong video game player and collector. Starting out with retro consoles like the Atari 2600 and NES, through modern systems including PC gaming, video games have remained a primary hobby. Joshua now shares this passion via online videos, featuring reviews, game pickups, topic discussions, and unboxings, as well as co-hosting the bi-weekly The Game Tenants Podcast.

Jeremy Parish is a former editor-in-chief at 1UP and USgamer. He now works Mission Control for the Retronauts podcast and retronauts.com.

Patrick Scott Patterson is a video game advocate, historian, and preservationist. Gaming since 1981, Patterson works full-time in his efforts to ensure the legacy of the industry and culture are not lost to time. Check out his work at www.patrickscottpatterson.com.

Eric "8-Bit Eric" Perez is a professional wrestler and popular retro gaming YouTuber. You can find his channel at finalbosses.com.

Christopher "The Old Ass Retro Gamer" Pico is a filmmaker and has been a diehard gamer since his parents purchased an Atari 2600 when he was a child. When he lost his job of eleven years in 2011, he was forced to sell his video game collection, which he had been amassing since the late '90s, to pay the bills. When he returned to the hobby in 2013, he created The Old Ass Retro Gamer YouTube vlog to document his quest to reclaim his collection. He counts the Super Nintendo as his favorite console of all time, followed by the Sega Dreamcast and PlayStation 2.

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Matt Raithel has, within the past decade, held a production role in more than fifty video games ranging from the iPhone to the Wii U, all while helping grow three different game development studios. He currently owns and leads the team at Graphite Lab, a video game development studio which was listed as "One to Watch" by *Game Informer* magazine in 2015. Matt is also on staff at Maryville University in St. Louis as an Instructor of Game Design, where he teaches classes focusing on game design principles as well as the history of game design.

Kris Randazzo started gaming on an Atari 2600 Jr. back when he was a wee lad, and he's been fascinated by all things video game ever since. He's worked at FuncoLand, Toys 'R Us, Game Crazy, GameStop, and even Nintendo itself for a brief period. He's currently Editor-in-Chief of Geekade.com, co-host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, host of the WaveBack Video Game Music Podcast, writer of the Stone Age Gamer blog, a regular contributor to *Nintendo Force Magazine*, and the proud owner of a sizeable (and remarkably heavy) video game collection. He also likes tacos.

Benjamin Reeves is a writer, journalist, beer maker, and geek sponge. He is currently a senior editor for *Game Informer Magazine*. His passions include video games, comic books, science fiction (or fact), and nearly every other thing that got you picked on in high school. Check out his novel, *Kill Screen*, available via www.amazon.com and www.barnesandnoble.com.

John Riggs grew from being completely unknown in the gaming industry to being moderately obscure. He's been a featured guest on the Metal Jesus Rocks YouTube channel and hosts his own humble channel (RIGG'd Games) showing tutorials on how to fix and save your old video games. Riggs loves the new games, but you can still find him digging through boxes of Famicom carts or filing through PC Engine CD games at various video game conventions. He's a sucker for the classics.

Dan Ryan is a co-host of the Stone Age Gamer podcast and a writer and podcaster for Geekade.

Greg Sewart is the former Previews and Reviews Editor of *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, as well as a contributor to outlets such as G4TV, *Official US PlayStation Magazine*, Games Radar, and more. He later moved into development, working on titles like *Robotech: Invasion*, the Madden NFL series, and *Elite: Dangerous*. He is currently the head of game development at The REDspace. In his free time, Greg co-founded the Player One Podcast with fellow *EGM* alumni, Chris Johnston, and has co-hosted the show for more than ten years and 500 episodes. His love of retro games also lead to the creation of the YouTube series Generation 16, which examines the games and history surrounding Sega's Mega Drive/Genesis console. He's also amassed a collection of around 3,000 games. Check out his work at www.playeronepodcast.com and www.generation-16.com.

Barry Shank, who began gaming on the Atari 2600, is the founder of GHG (Gamers Helping Gamers) on Facebook He started buying games for the Atari from the flea market in the '80s with his dad, who refused to spend more than $3 per game. From there, he moved on to the Genesis and now has a game room that contains every console since. His current passion is working with his group to help people find the games they want at reasonable prices.

Adam Shub, a.k.a. Squarepainter, is a Philadelphia-based pixel artist who has been painting video game art since 2005. Adam has loved art and video games from an early age, and Squarepainter is a culmination of the two. He's been part of the burgeoning art scene in New York City since 2008, and the retro gaming convention circuit since 2010.

Andy Slaven and his friends, Michael Collins and Luke Barnes, founded *Video Game Bible* in 2000, in an effort to create the first comprehensive video game guide for consoles released from 1985 through the guide's eventual publication in 2002. Andy's work has been featured in *Game Informer*, *Tips & Tricks*, the All Game Guide, and *Toy World Magazine*.

Stephen Smith is a video game enthusiast who has been a staff writer for Advanced Media Network and Kombo.com. He contributed to *Video Game Collector* magazine and worked with Eggroll Games, which specialize in apps for children. Stephen also founded Burrito Game Company and is the programmer of *Road Duel*, a homebrew game for the Atari 2600.

Zack "Aggro Sky" Smith is the editor-in-chief and founder of Gaming Rebellion (www.gamingrebellion.com). He has been gaming since the tender age of four when his Uncle Doug gave him an Atari 2600. Zack dabbles in both modern and classic games equally and likes to examine both sides of every coin. He also loves the outdoors, scuba diving, aquariums, and the occasional bonsai tree project. You can follow him on Twitter @zfunk007 and friend him on his Facebook page.

Shane Stein wrote film, music, and video game reviews for his college newspaper, *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, while attending the University of Pennsylvania from 1996 to 2000. He is an avid retro gamer who still owns an NES, SNES, N64, Intellivision, and IBM PC Jr, with his favorite all-time games being *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*, *Street Fighter II*, and *NBA Jam*. Some of his greatest fanboy moments include building his own Mega Man costume, buying his wife a foot massager because it resembled *Super Mario 3*'s Kuribo's Shoe, and rocking his kids to sleep as infants by humming them video game theme songs (it usually worked). In the non-gaming world, Shane works as a financial advisor and lives in his hometown

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of Dallas, Texas with his wife Tracey and their three daughters.

Rob Strangman is the author of *Memoirs of a Virtual Caveman*, a book about his experiences growing up during the "golden age" of gaming. He's a regular contributor to both *Little Player* magazine and the *Digital Press* fanzine. Rob first made a name for himself in the online classic gaming community in 1998, with his website The OPCFG, then later went on to found the Splatterhouse fan page, West Mansion: The Splatterhouse Homepage. Due to his work on West Mansion, Rob was asked to be a consultant on gameplay and authenticity for the 2010 video game, *Splatterhouse* (PlayStation 3/Xbox 360).

Darren Sulfridge, a gamer since the *Pong* days, has been an avid collector of console, computer, and arcade games for more than twenty years. He's also one of the founders of the Let's Play Gaming Expo, an annual video game celebration that takes place in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

John Szczepaniak has been a journalist for more than fifteen years and has interviewed more than 180 people. He is also a novelist and copy editor. His trilogy of interview books, *The Untold History of Japanese Game Developers*, is available on Amazon and totals nearly a million words detailing previously undocumented secrets about your favorite Japanese games, direct from the developers themselves. He's written for Gamasutra, *Game Developer Magazine*, *Retro Gamer*, *GamesTM*, *Official PlayStation Magazine*, The Escapist, and Hardcore Gaming 101, plus more than a dozen other outlets.

Sarah Szefer is an English-to-French translator who worked as team lead on the French-Canadian adaptation of *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D* for the Nintendo 3DS, based on the European French N64 translation.

Michael Thomasson is one of the most widely respected video game historians in the field today. He currently teaches college-level video game history, design, and graphics courses. For television, Michael conducted research for MTV's video game-related program, *Video MODS*. In print, he authored *Downright Bizarre Games*, and has contributed to nearly a dozen textbooks. Michael's historical columns have been distributed in newspapers and magazines worldwide. He has written business plans for several vendors and managed a dozen game-related retail stores spanning three decades. Michael consults for multiple

video game and computer museums and has worked on nearly one hundred game titles on Atari, Coleco, Sega, and other console platforms. In 2014, the *Guinness Book of World Records* declared that Thomasson had "The Largest Video Game Collection" in the world. His businesses sponsor gaming tradeshows and expos across the U.S. and Canada. Visit www.gooddealgames.com.

Alex Thompson is a self-proclaimed "nerd of all trades." He loves comic books and has a passion for video games that goes back to when he played the NES at his aunt's house when he was only three years old. While most twenty-somethings have a passion for the newer disc-based games and modern downloads, Alex still loves the feeling of popping a cartridge into his Nintendo 64 for some retro greatness. He currently works for PopNerdTV.com as the Chief Content Officer, and you can hear him talk about new video game releases on his YouTube show, Now Loading.

Thor Thorvaldson is one of those weirdos who turned his childhood obsession into a paying job, converting his love for *Pac-Man*, *Donkey Kong*, and *Dig Dug* into a semi-career of creating art for *Nintendo Force Magazine*, *RETRO* magazine, *Little Player* magazine, and Hardcore Gaming 101. Creating artwork for their endeavors, he has also worked with Bryan Belcher's Mega Man-athon, David Craddock, and John Szczepaniak, along with numerous Nerdcore Hip-Hop musicians, including Random a.k.a. Mega Ran, Mikal kHill, DJ Cutman, Sulfur, and Tribe One. Thor loves the '80s, Pokémon, and pizza.

Sean Tiedeman is an award-winning filmmaker who revels in popular culture. He wears many hats (literally—it's rare to see him not wearing one!) as director, producer, editor, musician, camera operator, and cinematographer. Sean's love of video games and passion for filmmaking resulted in his documentary *The King of Arcades*, co-produced by Adam F. Goldberg, creator of *The Goldbergs* on ABC. Tiedeman also writes, records, and performs novelty songs under the stage name of Irish Elvis. His song "80s Arcade" aired on several syndicated radio shows, including *The Dr. Demento Show*. Learn more at SeanTiedeman.com.

Juan Vaca is an American game designer at Telltale Games and an advocate for authentic representation in storytelling. He believes the player agency created through games is a powerful tool for empathy. His credits include: Telltale's The Walking Dead series, *Tales from the Borderlands*, *Batman*, *Minecraft: Story Mode*, *The Amazing Spider-Man: The Game*, and *Deadpool*. He is currently writing his memoirs from his time in the service as a Marine sniper, and he can often be found on his couch watching movies, playing games, or reading comics. Juan also plays the jug (yes, the jug) and baritone horn for The Rivertown Skifflers, which he calls "The Best Jug Band in the Bay Area."

David Warhol is a thirty-five-year veteran game designer/programmer/producer. One of the original Mattel Intellivision "Blue Sky Rangers," David is also recognized for creating the soundtracks for dozens of video and computer games in the '80s before

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founding Realtime Associates, Inc., developer of more than one hundred games to date. David remains active in game development and is currently using his early industry experience to pioneer new technical entertainment markets.

Charis McCoy Weiss married into the retro gaming world, where she has happily played Diddy to Brett's Donkey Kong for more than two decades. A high school English and journalism teacher, she frequently has the privilege of reading Brett's articles before anyone else. While she is grateful for Brett's career and her own, she is most proud of their collaboration, raising two children, Ryan and Katie.

Ryan Weiss is the son of author Brett Weiss. He's a student at the University of Texas at Austin and plans to become a history teacher. While his studies, social life, and obsession with movies and the reality show *Survivor* limit him from playing video games on a regular basis, his love for Mario and *Star Wars* keep him coming back.

Greg Wilcox is the creator of Destroy All Fanboys (fanboydestroy.com).

Krystle-Dawn M. Willing is a school librarian, meticulously preserving appreciation for the past and innovatively curating ambition for the future. She believes in emphasizing the "story" in history, using nostalgia and personality to connect with and inspire audiences. While co-producing the documentary *The King of Arcades*, Krystle lost a game of *Table Tennis* (a precursor to *Pong*) on the Odyssey to its creator, Ralph H. Baer. He influenced her to explore the impact of "edu-gaming" on students. As a writer, Krystle has been published in multiple anthologies and edits manuscripts in her spare time. Mostly, though, she enjoys playing new and old school video games with her son.

Jeffrey Wittenhagen is an avid retro video game author, collector, and gamer, and he's a member of the VGBS Gaming Podcast. Jeff has written and published several books, including *Hidden Treasures* and successful Kickstarter releases of *The Complete NES*, *The Complete SNES*, and *NES Oddities & the Homebrew Revolution*. Supplementing the books are "Video Game Compendiums" consisting of personal stories from contributors. Jeff is always working on tons of projects and puts as much passion behind them as he possibly can.

Steve Woita's first job after graduating from college in Electrical Engineering was at Apple Computer as one of their earliest employees. He worked on the Apple II, fixing thousands of motherboards for production, then on to R&D for Lisa, Apple III, Apple IIe, and the Apple 80 column card for the Apple II. He co-designed Sirius Software's JoyPort and later co-designed the MouseStick for the original Macintosh. Steve moved to Atari in 1982, and created *Quadrun* (featuring his voice), *TAZ*, *Asterix* (the first 2600 game exclusively designed for Europe), and *Garfield* (unreleased). Steve, who is still designing games, has worked on numerous other titles, including: *Super Sprint* (NES); *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, *Sonic Spinball*, and *Kid Chameleon* (Genesis); *Army Men Sarge's Heroes* (PS1, 3DO); and *Gubble 1* and *Gubble 2* (PC, PS1, iOS). For more info, check stevewoita.wordpress.com.

Robert Workman is a devoted classic video game fan who has established a fine career writing reviews and editorials for a variety of websites, including AOL, GameDaily, Segadojo, Prima Games, and Comicbook.com, amongst others. While he enjoys many of today's contemporary games, his heart is firmly placed in the old-school, since he grew up with the likes of the NES, SNES, and Sega Genesis. Gaming may have changed over the years, but for Robert there's always time for another round of *Castlevania: Dracula X*.

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